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FORECASTING CHILD-FRIENDLY PROTECTION:

A COMPOSITE INDEX AND ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Samuel Kruchkow, this is dedicated to you. Thank you for pushing me to move across the country, all by myself, to reach my goals of getting my PhD. Thank you for always believing that I am destined for greatness and that my purpose in the world is to share knowledge and inspire others. I love you and miss you forever. May your soul rest in peace.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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According to international policy, states hold primary responsibility in taking all appropriate measures to protect, prevent and respond to VAC. Rights-based approaches are often used to guide research in areas of child welfare, VAC, and more recently criminal justice interventions. The use of composite indices in research has been recognized as a beneficial tool in measuring country performance in various rights-related areas, including child welfare and protection. This study sought to understand how well countries in the European Union perform in achieving Child Friendly Protection through the construction of the Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) comprising of four critical domains: protection, prevention, response/intervention and justice. It was guided by two key research questions: (1) What factors explain variations in country performance within and across index domains? (2) What external factors, explain country performance in the CFPI framework? In terms of country CFPI performance, Sweden ranked the highest, with Spain closely behind. In contrast, Greece ranked the lowest in achieving child friendly protection. In addition, regression analysis

concluded that countries with stronger rule of law would perform better in the CFPI framework.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Child Friendliness Index ..... CFI

Child Friendly Protection Index ..... CFPI

Children's Advocacy Centers ..... CAC

Child Sexual Abuse ..... CSA

Council of Europe ..... COE

European Union ..... EU

Female Genital Mutilation ..... FGM

General Comment ..... GC

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect ..... ISPCAN

United Nations ..... UN

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ..... UNCRC or CRC

Violence Against Children ..... VAC

World Health Organization ..... WHO

CHAPTER 1: Problem Statement, Purpose & Objectives of the Research

Problem Statement

Child maltreatment remains a key concern within the international community, impacting all countries regardless of context, culture, or social status. Over the past year alone, over 1 billion children, aged 2 to 17, suffered from child maltreatment across the globe (Sethi et al., 2018). Of these abuse classifications, child sexual abuse (hereafter CSA) is cited as being the most difficult to measure, detect, and identify (UNICEF, 2014). Estimates suggest that over 150 million girls and 73 million boys have been exposed to sexual victimization during childhood (Pinheiro, 2006). The secret and sensitive nature of sexual violence against children impede the ability to grasp the true magnitude of the problem and often hinder efforts to prevent, protect, and prosecute such cases (UNICEF, 2014; Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2019). According to the World Health Organization (or WHO), in Europe alone, over 55 million children have experienced child maltreatment (Sethi et al., 2018), and it is believed that 1 in 5 European children are subject to sexual abuse in their lifetime (Council of Europe, 2014). The realization of the true magnitude, burden, and consequences of violence against children within the international context has grown significantly over the past two decades (Raman et al., 2017; Ramiro-Gonzalez et al., 2019). What is worse, this phenomenon will continue to be a widespread issue across the globe and children in all contexts, across all levels of society, and in all settings will remain at risk of victimization if states do not allocate sufficient resources to establish proper protective and preventive mechanisms (Ramiro-Gonzalez et al., 2019).

Violence against children (or VAC) is not only a public health crisis but also a grave human rights violation. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter CRC), states hold primary responsibility-taking all appropriate measures to protect, prevent, and respond to VAC (Sandberg, 2018). It is known, however, that efforts to combat violence against children vary significantly across countries. The United Nations General-Secretary's global study (2006) was one of the first international studies to bring to light the true manifestations of violence against children. The study revealed that despite the ratification of legally binding international human rights conventions, such as the CRC, the majority of states fail to meet their obligations to protect children from violence. In many countries, certain forms of violence were legal, socially accepted, and state-authorized. Consequently, the UN study urges countries to fully commit to ending all forms of violence against children. The study is built on two central messages: No violence against children is justifiable, and all violence against children is preventable (Pinheiro, 2006).

The UN study on violence against children has served as a catalyst for change in the way that violence against children is recognized and addressed internationally. As a starting point, the study helped establish a standard definition of what constitutes violence against children (Pinheiro, 2006). International research within fields of child welfare, human rights, and, more recently, criminal justice, has noted significant variances in how violence against children is conceptualized within the global context (Raman et al. 2017; Chandron et al., 2011). For example, although there is somewhat of an agreement on what behaviors/actions are considered to be forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation, there is less agreement regarding the social conditions and behaviors

impacting a child's health, safety, and development (Dubowitz, 2016). Findings from the World Perspectives on Child Abuse, published by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (2014), indicate that most countries consider physical abuse by a parent or caregiver and sexual abuse to be child maltreatment. In contrast, physical discipline was only considered child maltreatment by 53 percent of respondent countries. These findings indicate that corporal punishment in many countries is still considered a justifiable and normative disciplinary practice (ISPCAN, 2014).

Global conceptions of what constitutes violence against children are further reflected within a country's legal framework. The development and implementation of adequate policies and programs to protect children and respond to victimization are hindered without clear definitions of what actions are considered abusive and exploitative (Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2019). Echoing this, the World Health Organization asserts that "…the various sectors involved in addressing child maltreatment need to develop a common conceptual definition of child maltreatment and common operational definitions to enable case identification and enumeration (WHO, 2006, p. 3-4)." Therefore, it is recognized that a sound legal framework is a crucial step towards combatting violence against children. This is further supported by the UN's urging of states to:

> [P]rohibit all forms of violence against children, in all settings, including all corporal punishment, harmful traditional practices, such as early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes, sexual violence, and torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, as required by international treaties, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children annual report to the UN General Assembly, A/65/262, para 20)

Under the normative framework of the CRC, states should develop, implement, and enforce legislation that not only prohibits but also effectively prevents and responds to all forms of violence against children (Sethi et al., 2018; Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010; Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019). The problem is that despite the existence of international law and child rights standards, many states continue to focus on the rights of adult caregivers and privacy within the home, which hinders the development of better policies and enforcement of legal provisions to protect children. In states where certain behaviors are considered to be culturally or socially acceptable, such as corporal punishment or female genital mutilation (FGM), it is particularly important for a clear and concise legal framework that bans such practices (Chandron et al., 2011; Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2019). The existence of laws prohibiting various forms of child maltreatment and exploitation not only holds perpetrators accountable but also communicates with society what is deemed appropriate and what is not. However, to fully protect and prevent childhood violence, and better respond once it has occurred, significant efforts must be made to narrow the gaps between law, policy, and practice (Chandron et al., 2011; Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2019; Johansson & Stefanson, 2019; Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019).

To narrow this gap in policy and practice, is it essential that we have the ability to distinguish which countries are working to end violence against children, which countries are not, and which countries show promise. Comparative research tracking and evaluating the progress of EU member states in ending violence against children remains

rather fragmented (WHO, 2018). In 2018, the World Health Organization published the *European Status Report on Preventing Child Maltreatment* which assessed country-level progress towards achieving three primary objectives: (1) making child maltreatment more visible, (2) developing national plans to coordinate action, and (3) implementing prevention programs. Findings from the report suggest that while some progress has been made in the prevention of child maltreatment, countries should invest more in population-based, multidisciplinary, and evidence-based strategies (WHO, 2018). Furthermore, it concludes that countries throughout the region should develop and implement more comprehensive programs and policies to prevent child maltreatment at the national level.

Beyond the importance of the specific findings of the WHO report, it establishes a starting point for this dissertation study in that it provides *prevention profiles* for each country based on several critical indicators. Still, it does not comparatively rank countries in a way that assesses progress within each of the indicator areas (Sethi et al., 2018). While the WHO report sheds light on the status of ending violence against children within the domain of prevention policy, it does not capture the entire spectrum or multi-levels of national efforts to protect the child's right to live free from violence. Less is known about how states perform in protecting and enabling children's rights once victimization has occurred. As a result, the national level progress towards ending all forms of violence against children remains unclear. The WHO's approach to VAC has focused on policy formulation without a systematic analysis of its implementation. Relatedly, we lack a way to assess and understand policy implementation of VAC policy; in other words, we do not know how well countries actually perform in promoting the human rights of children and protecting them from violence and exploitation. It is here

where this study seeks to provide critical answers to the pressing need to evaluate the implementation of VAC policy by EU states.

The CRC, along with other international and regional standards protecting children from violence, requires states to not only establish laws and prioritize prevention but also implement provisions for responding and intervening once it has occurred (Sandberg, 2018; Johansson & Stefansen, 2019). These provisions include regulations for reporting and referral, investigation and prosecution, treatment and follow-up, and judicial involvement (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019). Recognizing the rights and complex needs of children in disclosure and during criminal investigations and proceedings, several countries throughout Europe and North America have committed to overcome these barriers through child-centered, interdisciplinary, and multi-agency approaches to child abuse (Johansson & Stefansen, 2019). In Europe, recent reforms in national legislation indicate a more substantial commitment to the development of response services and interventions for children exposed to violence. Still, the scope and extent of mechanisms for actual implementation remain unclear (McElvaney & Lalor, 2014).

Although prior research has examined national-level efforts and performance, separately, in areas such as child well-being, maltreatment prevention, protection, and social services, and participation in judicial proceedings, no tool exists that provides a comprehensive and multi-level assessment that measures country performance across the critical domains of protection, prevention, and the response. Based on the current state of research, I argue that we need to focus on measures and strategies that (a) prevent

violence from occurring in the first place, (b) enable detection and disclosure of victimization, and (c) protect the child from secondary victimization before, during, and after investigation and criminal proceedings.

Purpose and Objectives

This research study sought to contribute to the existing need to understand efforts to combat violence against children. It integrated an empirical, descriptive, and comparative analysis to assess country performance in protecting, preventing, and responding to violence against children in EU member states. The primary objectives were to *understand the structures, systems, and conditions of member states relevant to a child's rights and protection* and *investigate critical factors that explain country performance*. To achieve these two objectives, I first developed a composite index to assess the extent to which countries are protecting children from violence. Building on Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as other fundamental international and regional guidelines, the composite index examined country efforts in ending violence against children across three key domains: protection, prevention, and response. In addition, I constructed an additional index domain to assess the child-friendliness of justice systems for child victims. I performed OLS regression and reliability analyses to determine the strength and validity of the composite index. I then sought to explain country variations in achieving comprehensive child-centered protection by examining relationships at the domain levels. Lastly, I examined relationships between Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) performance and a number of contextual variables related to poverty, gender inequality, the rule of law, child rights implementation, and access to justice. Overall, my dissertation study aimed to develop a

multidimensional tool that will identify key dimensions that must be addressed to ensure sustainable implementation of integrated child protection throughout Europe.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a thorough examination of the international normative framework for the child's right to protection from violence. It dissects the core international agreements related to protection of children, primarily focusing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its relevant Articles and General Comments. This section also discusses how rights-based approaches have been used in prior research to measure child welfare, child protection and violence against children. It identifies how the existence of laws and policies to combat violence against children (VAC) is only the beginning to addressing the problem and that actual program implementation and prevention mechanisms are equally important. Moreover, there needs to be more efforts focusing on the implementation of child-friendly practices that not only prioritize the child's human rights, but also avoid secondary victimization by child welfare and criminal justice systems.

Chapter 3: Assessment of Countries Combating Violence Against Children

This chapter provides further exploration into the state of rights-based approaches and VAC intervention throughout Europe. The implementation of efforts focusing on child-friendly justice approaches and the European Barnahus model are noted as promising practices to better respond to VAC. However, research examining the effectiveness and transferability of these approaches remains scant. Following this section, a deeper discussion is presented, which focuses on how children's rights can be

measured and how composite indices in research have proven to be beneficial in doing so. Examples of existing child rights-related indices are provided to explore the status of European countries across a spectrum of issues including child welfare/protection, child abuse, and access to justice. In doing so, this chapter essentially explains the value of composite indices in research and why this methodology was selected for this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology section is broken down into two separate parts. The first part explains how the Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) was constructed. Based on prior research on composite indicators, the CFPI is comprised of four key domains: (1) Protection, (2) Prevention, (3) Response/Intervention and (4) Child-Friendly Justice. The cumulative score is calculated for each country in the EU28 and they are then ranked from highest to lowest in CFPI performance. The next section explains how reliability analysis is used to determine the internal strength of the CFPI. Lastly, OLS regression is applied to explore relationships between a country's CFPI score and five external composite variables: (1) Rule of Law, (2) Child Rights, (3) Access to Justice, (4) Gender Equality, and (5) Poverty.

Chapter 5: Findings

The last section of this research discusses findings starting with the final product of the CFPI framework, which covers four (4) domains and their assigned indicators. Sum scores are calculated for each domain and then a final composite score is calculated for each country. As a result, Spain ranked the highest for the CFPI and Malta the lowest. Next, results from the reliability analysis indicated that the CFPI did not demonstrate any significance, even when certain variables were removed from the analysis. Lastly, OLS

regression is applied to examine country scores in CFPI against the aforementioned external variables. Of these five (5) independent variables, Access to Justice demonstrated to be the only variable of significance. As a result, one can suggest that countries where children's access to justice is greater, will also have stronger performance in the CFPI.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

At the bare minimum, all of these countries are parties to the CRC, which requires them to have effective legislation in place to protect children from violent victimization. However, simply the existence of legislation on the books does not mean said laws are being implemented or, further, implemented effectively. Nevertheless, national laws to protect children from violence must align with international standards as a starting point. It is also important for such laws to address the deeper rooted social and political dynamics within the given country and be responsive to the basic needs and rights of the child.

Another important aspect of rights-based child protection has to do with prevention efforts. In addition to existence and implementation of protective legislation, countries should also be involved in raising awareness of the magnitude, risks and outcomes of violence against children. Due to the sensitive nature of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, it is important to shed light on the seriousness and extent of these crimes. The simple existence of laws is not enough without the existence of prevention and awareness raising policies and programming. One of the best approaches to combatting VAC is preventing its occurrence in the first place, which should always remain a key focus in child protection.

When existence of laws and prevention efforts are not enough, it is important to have well-trained and holistic support services in place to respond once violence has occurred. This includes a multi-disciplinary approach, involving not only police, but also prosecutors, judges, mental health and medical professionals, etc. These systems' responses should be focused on maintaining the best interests of the child victim and avoid any form of secondary re-traumatization. While it is important that perpetrators be held accountable for the harm they have caused, it is equally, if not more, important that victims receive the support they need without being re-traumatized by the systems set in place to protect them and help them achieve justice.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

A Rights-Based Approach to Child Protection

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child serves as a normative framework to guide in the examination of children's rights implementation across the globe. Within the context of violence against children (or VAC), Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with other interrelated articles and supplementary general comments (GC), provides authoritative guidance for states to protect, prevent and respond to VAC. As such, and to comparatively assess the state of child protection within a given country, it is important understand how child rights and VAC are governed within the international context/framework. The following section provides a brief overview of the state of children's rights and protections within the international context.

International (Normative) Framework for Child's Right to Protection from Violence

Violence against children continues to be a widespread issue impacting children across the globe. International strategies grounded in human rights have established standards and guidelines for protecting the rights of children in general, and for protecting children in vulnerable situations, including exposure to violent victimization. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most comprehensive legally-binding instrument and framework for the rights of all children. Since its adoption in 1989, nearly all countries across the globe have ratified the Convention except for the United States (Kim & Yoo, 2015; Vaghri et al., 2019). Upon ratification, countries are legally obligated to respect and promote the series of rights enshrined within the treaty, which includes the child's right to be protected from all

forms of violence. CRC Article 19 requires states to take a number of measures to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence in all settings and contexts. Article 19, the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence states as follows:

1. *States parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.*
2. *Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment, and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.*

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19).

Article 19 describes the types of measures required to protect children from all forms of violence and how such measures shall be applied across all stages of intervention. The child's right to be protected from violence is further elaborated in General Comment 13 (GC 13), which provides an authoritative interpretation of the CRC provision (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010; Sandberg, 2019). The drafting of GC 13 sought to transform the way states to address issues of child protection in policy and practice, with a particular focus towards mainstreaming a child-rights approach which prioritizes primary prevention and promotes the well-being of all children (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2011; Bennett et al., 2009). The United Nations Committee on the

Rights of the Child (the Committee) constructed GC 13 in hopes of satisfying the following objectives:

1. Provide guidance to states parties and relevant stakeholders in understanding their obligations for protecting children from violence;
2. Outline the necessary legislative, judicial, social, and education measures required to protect children from violence;
3. Overcome challenges for child protection which stem from isolated, fragmented and reactive strategies;
4. Promote a holistic approach;
5. Provide the basis for developing and implementing a coordinating framework
6. Highlight the need to act promptly in fulfilling obligations

The nearly universal ratification of the CRC and subsequent legal reforms across the globe do not fully capture whether states have taken adequate measures to implement the CRC fully, nor does it provide an accurate representation of the extent to which countries are accountable for protecting specific rights of children. As noted in Vaghri et al. (2019), the widespread ratification of international human rights treaties, such as the CRC, invites us to ask two crucial questions: which factors hinder more progress towards realizing these rights and who is responsible for removing such obstacles? Evidence has demonstrated that the development and application of indicators can serve as a better means to measure and monitor country progress in various areas of human rights. In several other policy areas, composite indicators and indices are useful tools for governments, policymakers, practitioners, and academics because they can demonstrate

complex and multi-faceted issues in a clear, concise, and simplified manner. Prior research (Lamb & Land, 2013; Mekonen, 2010; O'Hare & Gutierrez, 2012; Vaghri et al., 2019) has used indicators to operationalize various policies, guidelines, and documents across multiple disciplinary fields. However, existing indicators related to child rights and well-being have often failed to address the multiple aspects of a specific right, aspects which are crucial for its implementation (Vaghri et al., 2019).

Measuring Child Protection: A Rights-Based Approach

A rights-based approach is often used to guide research in the areas of child welfare, children impacted violence, and more recently criminal justice interventions (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019; Johansson & Stefanson, 2019; Sandberg, 2018). A child-rights based approach is a conceptual framework that is normatively based on international child rights standards, which focuses on promoting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of children (Hart et al., 2011). As stated by Hart and colleagues, "A human rights approach to child protection is the central catalyst for a paradigm shift to transform child protection (2011)."

Under CRC Article 19, *violence* is defined as "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (para. 1)." The Committee expands this definition, recognizing the "need to address non-physical and/or non-intentional forms of harm (such as, inter alia, neglect and psychological maltreatment) (Hart et al., 2011, p. 975)." Within the international context, rights-based approaches are often used to inform measurement of duty bearers with specific human rights duties towards children impacted by violence. The term *duty bearer* refers to various roles and responsibilities of individuals,

institutions, and sectors, across all levels, who are responsible for upholding specific children's rights (Hart et al., 2011). In regard to VAC, duty bearers refer to those responsible for protecting and fulfilling the child's right to protection from violence, as detailed explicitly in Article 19 and GC 13. These protections are further supported by a number of other provisions within and throughout the CRC.

Apart from recognizing the importance of duty bearers, the United Nations, along with other international and regional organizations, have emphasized the importance of acknowledging key differences and vulnerabilities between adults and children. As a starting point, it is important to have a clear understanding of who is considered a *child* within the international context. Although definitions vary among academics, policymakers, and practitioners, the most consistent definition is provided by the United Nations. According to the United Nations, the term *child* refers to individuals under the age of 18 years old (UNCRC, Art. 1). See Article 1 of the CRC (1989).

National legislative provisions related to age requirements define the extent to which children are able to exercise certain rights within different contexts. Although the CRC defines *child* as a person under the age of 18 years old and requires states to protect their rights until they have reached adulthood, age-related provisions in national laws often do not align with this standard. As a result, children are not able to fully exercise their rights in many contexts due to their age. Prior research indicates that minimum age requirements vary significantly throughout the EU.

Under GC13, a child rights approach "is based on the declaration of the child as a rights holder and not a beneficiary of benevolent activities of adults" (Hart et al., 2011, p. 973). When it comes to provisions for the protection of children, the Committee requests

States Parties to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18 years old for both genders. In addition, they believe that the marital and/or emancipated status of a child to be a social construct, as many states allow forced marriage due to traditional practices (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2011). According to Svevo-Cianci et al. (2011, p. 981), "GC13 strengthens the goal of all children having rights to protection in practice, specifically including children who assume an adult role, without the capacity to protect themselves from violence, due to their level of development as children." Therefore, children under 18 years old who are forced into marriage or emancipated should still be granted special protection measures and be able to exercise their rights as defined by the CRC (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2011).

In addition to rights-based approaches, numerous international organizations and advocacy groups have emphasized the need for more a more holistic approach to children's rights and protection concerns. Webster's dictionary defines *holistic* as "relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts." The CRC, along with the Articles and General Comments that comprise it, is considered to be holistic in nature. The rights of the child outlined in the CRC include various civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights, all of which are interrelated and universal.

The term holistic, in itself, focuses on the whole system rather than fragmented parts of the system. The normative framework of the CRC is comprised of different articles and general comments which detail the rights of all children, many of which are interrelated. Within the context of protecting children from violence, there exists a complex interrelationship between the rights of children and the responsibilities of key

stakeholders/duty bearers comprising the child protection system. The threat or perceived threat of VAC requires response from multiple levels and sectors including government, social services, health and mental health services, and the criminal justice system. In order to holistically assess/measure how well children are protected within a given country, it is important to define the various components of a national child protection system and understand their roles and functions. This is also known as a systems-based approach.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Following the normative framework of the CRC and other relevant international and regional conventions, the starting point for ending VAC requires the implementation and enforcement of laws. For laws to effectively support efforts to end VAC, they must clearly define and prohibit all forms of violent behaviors and ensure justice for all victims. In addition, from a prevention standpoint, laws addressing risk factors for violence also support efforts to end VAC. However, the existence of laws alone does not reduce VAC, but legislation along with effective implementation and enforcement serves as a starting point for supporting efforts to end VAC (INSPIRE Strategies, 2018).

The legal and policy landscape of a country can be used to determine the extent to which governments are committed to addressing the issue of VAC at the international and national levels. When specific laws are not in place to protect children from victimization, strategies to respond to violence will likely falter (Chandron et al., 2011; Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2019). For example, if corporal punishment is not banned in all settings, there is no legal basis to respond to the issue, therefore hindering the utility of innovations and evidence-informed practice. Until recently, corporal punishment was

widely practiced throughout Europe. In 1979, Sweden was the first country in Europe and in the world to ban corporal punishment. This resulted in a significant decline in the acceptance of physical discipline as a form of punishment by the public throughout the country (Lalor & McElvaney, 2018).

The existence of laws prohibiting certain behaviors provides the essential foundation for communicating to the public that the behavior is not acceptable, and for subsequently eliminating it in practice (Lalor & McElvaney, 2018). When the legal framework to protect children from all forms of violence is weak, states are fundamentally failing to fulfill their obligations under the CRC, and the necessary services and sectors cannot adequately respond. Therefore, a comprehensive rights-based assessment of a country's progress in protecting children from violence must also include intersectoral strategies for preventing and responding to its occurrence.

Prevention and Response Interventions

In addition to the existence of a sound legal and policy framework to address VAC, the Committee stresses the importance of *prevention* strategies and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and coordinated framework for implementation. This includes the presence of children's rights monitoring bodies and existence a national child protection system for intervening and responding once victimization has occurred and preserves the rights of the child throughout the investigation and judicial processes (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019; Sandberg, 2018; Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010). Following a child rights-based approach, key concepts related to preserving the child's dignity, the rule of law principle, the empowerment and participation of children, and working in the best interests of the child are detailed throughout the document. General Comment 13 (GC 13)

was the first document published by the UN, which defined a child rights-based approach to child caregiving and protection. It states:

> *...A child rights approach is one which furthers the realization of the rights of all children as set out in the Convention by developing the capacity of duty bearers to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil rights (art. 4) and the capacity of rights holders to claim their rights, guided at all times by the rights to non-discrimination (art. 2), consideration of the best interests of the child (art. 3, para. 1), life, survival and development (art. 6), and respect for the views of the child (art. 12). Children also have the right to be directed and guided in the exercise of their rights by caregivers, parents and community members, in line with children's evolving capacities (art. 5). This child rights approach is holistic and places emphasis on supporting the strengths and resources of the child him/herself and all social systems of which the child is a part: family, school, community, institutions, religious and cultural systems.*
>
> (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, GC13, para. 59)

This human rights approach to child protection signifies a distinct paradigm shift away from the traditional welfare approach. The child rights-based approach recognizes children as rights holders rather than the dependents of adults. Governments, along with other key sectors and professionals, are considered primary stakeholders for ensuring that children's rights are respected, promoted, and protected. The overreaching aim of these two fundamental documents is overcome isolated, fragmented and reactive systems of protection, to encourage a holistic approach to securing the child's right to be protected from violence, and to provide states, and other relevant stakeholders, with a basis to develop a national coordinating framework for eliminating all forms of violence against

children (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010). The adoption of the CRC and subsequent ratification by countries across the globe signifies a monumental step towards the realization of children's rights in various contexts, including the right to be protected from violence and the right to remedy when rights are violated (Chandron et al., 2011; Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2011). However, to track states' progress in protecting the child's right to live free from violence, the various aspects of the right, which are relevant for its implementation, must also be taken into consideration. In addition, a rights-based approach to measure states' performance should consider the interactions between children, the state, and society on matters affecting them (Vaghri et al., 2012; Vaghri et al., 2019).

Safeguarding Child Rights: Systems Involvement – The Need for an Integrated Approach

Recognizing the complex needs of children in disclosure and during criminal investigations, several countries throughout Europe and North America have made the commitment to overcome these barriers through a child-centered, interdisciplinary, and multi-agency approach to child abuse/VAC. In addition to prevention and protection, child-friendly policies must also consider existing practices for investigation and judicial proceedings as it relates to child victims and witnesses. Concepts of child-friendly justice, integrated child protection systems, and Barnahus have gained popularity throughout the Europe, shedding light on the importance of not only protecting children from violence, but also enabling them to fully exercise their rights. However, the extent to which EU member states have initiated such practices remains unclear, as does the evidence-base for how successful such practice are in achieving better outcomes for children.

From a rights-based perspective, national governments are considered primary stakeholders in ensuring that children are protected from violent victimization and, when that right is violated, enabled to exercise their right to remedy and access justice. Stalford and colleagues state, "Virtually every provision of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 includes at least one reference to children's rights in the context of justice proceedings… (2017, page 207)." Provisions related to the right to legal assistance and representation, the right to participate in matters affecting their lives and decision-making processes, the right to avoid undue delay, and the right to be protected during all stages of the justice process are to name a few (Stalford et al., 2017). Recent developments within the realm of children's rights and protection have begun to focus more on the role and responsibilities of the criminal justice system. Within this context, systems and procedures should be adapted to the needs and rights of the child, regardless of their role (i.e., victim, witness, perpetrator, etc.). Thus, a comprehensive rights-based approach to VAC should incorporate not only protective and preventive measures, but also intervention and response mechanisms, which includes provisions for protecting child rights before, during, and after judicial proceedings (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019; Johansson & Stefanson, 2019; Sandberg, 2018).

Within the international context, there has been a growing recognition for the need of coordination within and across sectors, as violence against children often requires a response from multiple agencies, which includes professionals working in social services, law enforcement, courts, and the medical field (McElvaney & Lalor, 2014). In general, the reporting of suspected abuse initiates an investigation of allegations and collection of evidence. If abuse is substantiated and evidence is deemed sufficient by the governing

authority, the case can then be pursued in criminal court. However, these cases pose a significant challenge for stakeholders involved, especially when existing systems are fragmented, and the child's needs and rights are overlooked or misunderstood (Newman, Dannenfelser, & Pendleton, 2005; McElvaney & Lalor, 2014). Considerable risk of adverse case outcomes and harmful impacts on the child will exist without specialized knowledge of how child victims of abuse behave and function during an investigation and court procedures. This requires a balance between elements of due process and legal security while keeping the *best interests* of the child as a top priority (Diesen, 2002).

To provide better legal solutions for cases involving child victims, it is first essential to understand what happens when best-practice strategies are not present or under-developed. Following the disclosure and reporting of abuse, the case mainly enters the criminal justice system, which involves investigation, prosecution, trial, and post-trial procedures (Davidson, Bifulco, Thomas, & Ramsay, 2006). Each agency plays a different role, with specific required tasks, in bringing the case to justice. During the investigation phase, law enforcement is required to determine if a crime has occurred and obtain evidence to support the allegations (Walsh, Jones, Cross, & Lippert, 2010). The investigation generally involves the collection of victim statements, forensic interviewing, and medical examinations, each of which poses a unique set of challenges for those involved.

Once a case has been reported, the child victim is often required to go through a series of examinations, usually beginning with questioning by police and/or prosecutors. Interviewing child victims can be challenging for all those involved, including the victim. Interviewers must understand how trauma impacts the victim's ability to cope with legal

processes and how trauma affects the victim's memory of events, which can often result in conflicting statements (Back, 2012). Competent stakeholders should anticipate these potential legal hurdles and understand how to address such issues adequately. Law enforcement, in particular, is presented with the difficult task of conducting a thorough investigation and collecting evidence, while also tending to the victim's physical, emotional, and developmental state. Individual characteristics, skills, and circumstances may hinder the child's ability to provide key information (Back, 2012). In many cases, victims are required to tell their story over and over again, which has proven to be problematic for investigations and can cause secondary victimization to the child. As a result, many cases of child abuse/maltreatment do not make it through to prosecution.

Low prosecution rates, especially in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, remain a universal issue, primarily due to evidential difficulties during an investigation. Frequent discontinuation of cases, after the victim has undergone numerous interrogations and invasive examinations, can influence one's decision to report suspected abuse in the future (Walsh et al., 2010). The stress and longevity of investigations, especially in the absence of child-friendly practices, can be perceived by child victims and families as not worth it. If substantial evidence is gathered during the investigation, the prosecutor is more likely to pursue the case in court (Walsh et al., 2010). However, the use of child abuse victims in criminal proceedings presents another set of challenges for prosecutors, judges, and other courtroom personnel.

The victim's performance in court can negatively impact the progression of the case, even with strong supporting evidence (Faller & Henry, 2000). The decision of whether or not child victims should participate in court proceedings varies across jurisdictions.

Similar to that of investigation processes, questioning of children in court can be harmful to the victim, and overall case outcome (Walsh et al., 2010). The courtroom environment alone can be intimidating to a child. If required to testify against the accused, the behavior of attorneys during cross-examination can be perceived as threatening and frightening. Lengthy proceedings and extensive questioning are known to cause more harm to the victim as well. These courtroom dynamics increase the risk of re-traumatization, especially when the victim does not possess the skills necessary to cope due to age and other individual factors (Walsh et al., 2010).

Negative impacts of abuse can be inadvertently amplified when the child is required to revisit the traumatic experience. Repeated questioning can trigger feelings of helplessness, shame, guilt, and embarrassment. It can also cause the child to feel threatened and not believed by those who are supposed to be helping them (Goodman et al., 1992). Subsequently, these dynamics can impact the victim's willingness and ability to cooperate with the investigation and in court. They are also more likely to retract their statement, change their story, or shut down completely. These factors cause significant barriers to accessing valid evidence during investigations (Goodman et al., 1992; Ernberg, Magnusson, Landstrom, & Tidefors, 2018). Without sufficient statements, quality evidence, and supportive medical examinations, for cases of sexual violence, cases are likely to be discontinued. A low frequency of prosecution can also hinder the reporting of violence by others, further contributing to the continuous cycle of impunity and prevalence of various forms of violence against children (Walsh et al., 2010).

The ability to complete designated tasks and collect vital information is dependent on the competency of all professionals involved. Agencies tend to provide short-term

interventions and support to those who disclose abuse. However, the impacts of VAC are not only short-term and, therefore, require a comprehensive approach that supports victims before, during, and after investigations (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016). Evidence-based practices emphasize the importance of focusing on the best interests of the child victim in all decision-making processes. To achieve positive outcomes for all agencies involved, the needs, rights, and protections of child victims must not be overlooked. Regardless of the outcome, the child should come out of the process in a better state than before agencies became involved (Diesen, 2002).

Although challenging, children are not to be viewed as incompetent victims. Better prospects of child victims and overall case outcomes can be achieved by following a rights-based approach to child protection, which establishes appropriate safeguards to ensure the protection of children during all phases of the investigation. Evidence-based practices have shown that young victims are indeed capable of disclosure, providing statements, and giving testimony in court when certain needs and conditions are met (Herbert & Bromfield 2016). Child-friendly environments designed to promote sensitivity and specialized support have proven to be successful in meeting the needs criteria of responding agencies during the investigation and court proceedings, while also improving outcomes for child victims (Wenke, 2014).

Recognizing the complex needs of children in disclosure, during criminal investigations and throughout judicial proceedings, several countries throughout Europe and North America have committed to overcome these barriers and mainstream the rights of children through child-centered, interdisciplinary, and multi-agency strategies to combat the multi-faceted issue of violence against children (Johansson & Stefanson,

2019; Lalor & McElvaney, 2018; McElvaney & Lalor, 2014). However, the current state of the child's right to protection from violence and the extent of progress among EU member states in overcoming the multitude of barriers for full implementation has yet to be evaluated comprehensively and comparatively. One method to reform and implement better policies and practices to protect vulnerable children is by first identifying gaps and weaknesses within current systems at the national level. In doing so, key funding organizations, such as the UN and the EU, can develop better strategies and allocate resources in a way that addresses each country's situation individually.

To summarize, prior literature recognizes, based on international standards, children are better protected from violence through the existence of various laws and policies, and comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, it is equally important to recognize the needs of child victims once criminal and judicial proceedings begin, as they can easily be re-traumatized. These rights during court processes are also recognized internationally as universal right for all child victims and witnesses. Based on established methods to systemically assess and understand policy implementation of (VAC) policy, this study will develop a composite index to measure aspects of child rights and protection within the 28 countries comprising the European Union (EU28), as of 2019. In doing so, the composite index will assess and measure the efforts of EU member states in comprehensively responding to the multi-faceted issue of VAC across the spectrum of responses.

The Study Plan

Measuring Child Rights through Composite Indicators

The development of composite indicators to measure various aspects of child rights and well-being has been recognized as a powerful tool for comparing country performance (Lamb & Land, 2013; Mekonen, 2010; O'Hare & Gutierrez, 2012; Vaghri et al., 2019). However, a composite index measuring country performance, focusing exclusively on efforts to *protect, prevent,* and *respond* to VAC, has yet to be developed. National laws and policies to protect children from violence are only a starting point for a comprehensive child protection system. A sound legal framework provides the foundation for child protection, but to implement such laws and policies, governments must make available a number of provisions. A critical component of a comprehensive child protection system is the response of the criminal justice sector (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019; Sandberg, 2018). To date, a composite index measuring country performance in protecting child victims during the judicial process has yet to be developed.

The present study will proceed in four phases. The first phase of this research begins with a comprehensive literature review examining the state of research on combatting violence against children in Europe. It also provides an examination of some best practices and approaches for responding to violence against children in existing EU countries. The objective during this phase is to gauge not only the scope of VAC in Europe, but also understand what these countries have been doing to combat it. This review of literature also enables the development and construction of a composite index,

as presented in phase two, by identifying the critical areas necessary to combat and respond to VAC.

Phase two is a comprehensive assessment of where countries stand across three critical priority areas for combatting VAC: *protection*, *prevention*, and *response*.[1] The assessment's criteria are derived from the normative framework of the CRC and other international and regional instruments. The objective of the second phase of this research is to construct a composite measure of country performance to identify gaps in child protection and judicial systems within the EU. Unlike many existing indices related to child rights and well-being, indicators sourced focus primarily on structural and process indicators, rather than child-related outcomes. The development and selection of indicators are guided by the international normative framework of the UNCRC and further supported by core international and regional guidelines addressing various aspects of protecting and responding to violent victimization of children.

During the third phase, the aim is to comparatively assess country performance in combatting VAC across the spectrum of child rights-related issues and test the validity of the new composite index by examining variances with and across index domains. This internal exploration at the domain and sub-domain levels of analysis will allow for transparency in the strength of the overall index construction.

Lastly, in phase four, cross-country comparisons are further explained by incorporating a number of external variables, independent of the CFPI framework, which

[1] Following this review, I will introduce my research questions, hypotheses, and methods. After careful consideration, I elected to veer from the traditional dissertation format where the research questions and methods immediately follow the review of existing research because it is also important to review existing literature on frameworks and methods behind the construction/development of composite indices within the realm of child rights and protection.

are known to impact country-level performance in addressing issues of child rights and protection. These variables include: (a) rule of law, (b) child rights implementation, (c) children's access to justice, (d) gender inequality, and (e) poverty. This allows for better understanding of country performance by further examining associations/relationships between the CFPI index results and other independent factors.

In the next chapter, I provide a brief overview of the state of children's rights and protection in Europe. Following a rights-based approach, I examine how a child's right to be protected from violence is reflected in law and in practice. I then provide examples of promising practices of children's house models in Europe, along with supporting evidence to demonstrate the potential of such rights-based approaches to respond to VAC. In doing so, it enables the selection and construction of key indicators for my composite index, as detailed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: Assessment of Countries Combating Violence Against Children

Child Rights and Protection in Europe

The following sections examine various components of rights-based approaches to child protection in order to establish a baseline for what countries should be doing to combat violence against children. This baseline assists in the further development, composition, and selection of key indicators for my composite index design of *Child Friendly Victim Justice* (see Chapter 4).

A children's rights-based begins with the principle that children should have a voice in policies that directly affect their lives. A children's rights-based approach to participation takes into consideration children's evolving capacities and recognizes them as active participants, or rights holders, who are capable of finding solutions to issues affecting them (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017). International standards set out by the United Nations and European regional standards recognize the importance of guaranteeing the child's right to participate in all matters that affect them. The right to be heard, as detailed in Article 12, is a general principle of children's rights, linked to a number of other provisions and articles throughout the CRC related to non-discrimination (Article 2), the right of life, survival and development (Article 6), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to freedom of expression (Article 13), the right to information (Article 17), and the principle of evolving capacities (Article 5).

Participation, i.e., the 'right to be heard,' is not only a guiding principle of the CRC, but also a crucial element necessary for children to actively exercise their rights (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017). Article 12 is accompanied with General Comment 12, which provides further guidance for States Parties to effectively implement the standard through

all necessary legislative, policy, and practice measures. The principle of participation is enshrined in CRC Article 12, the right of the child to be heard, which states as follows:

1. *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child;*
2. *For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

Participation *in all matters affecting the child* within the context of children's rights is often referred to as a transitional process. Ruiz-Casares and colleagues frame participation as a continuum of arrangements contributing to the child's empowerment and development (2017). International standards provide states with clear guidance in how to promote and protect participatory rights of children within different settings. The development and implementation of such standards within the international community reflects the importance of acknowledging the evolving capacities of children (Forde, 2018). Therefore, the European Union should have a systematic tool to measure child 'participation' in matters that affect their lives.

Furthermore, prevalence and consequences of VAC across the globe warrants concerted efforts to prevent it and ensure full prohibition and elimination. According to the CRC, states should ensure the best interests of all children by establishing laws, policies, resources, monitoring and data collection mechanisms, as well as prevention,

protection and response services (UNCRC, 1989). Following the publication of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children in 2006, the Council of Europe (COE) published a set of policy guidelines on integrated strategies for the protection of children from violence, which were to foster the reform and development of national efforts to safeguard the rights of children and end all forms of violence against them. Subsequently, the COE defines an integrated child protection system as the way duty-bearers and system components work together in a cohesive, coordinated manner across sectors in a way that enables a protective and empowering environment for all children. Accordingly, the European Union must have a systematic tool to measure the 'preventive' steps that states have taken against violence against children.

The integrated strategies follow a child rights-based approach, which, as stated prior, recognizes children as rights holders and enables them to exercise their rights when violated. The approach is based on four cross-cutting principles of the CRC: (1) *best interests of the child, (2) non-discrimination, (3) child participation and (4) the right to life, survival and development.* As outlined by the European Commission:

> A rights-based approach to child protection implies taking all actions necessary to protect children's rights through preventing as well as responding to violations of those rights. Prevention, as a crucial aspect of a well-functioning child protection system, entails interagency and multidisciplinary work to tackle the root causes of violence against children, such as poverty, exclusion and discrimination.
>
> (European Commission, 2014, p. 6)

The integrated strategies seek to address the gaps in existing national child protection systems by establishing a protective environment for responding to violence against children. Furthermore, they encourage states to establish child-friendly services and mechanisms in order to safeguard the rights and ensure the best interests of children affected by violence.

VAC Intervention and Integrated Responses

Given the various components of the rights-based approaches to child protection described in the previous section, the CRC requires that states adopt a number of measures to protect children from violence including prevention, strengthening legal frameworks, administrative and judicial proceedings, and increasing availability of services, especially to victims (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019). When children's rights are violated, states are legally obligated to provide them with access to mechanisms to seek redress for the violations they have faced and to prevent recurrence of such violations. Remedies should be detailed within national law and fully accessible to victims of violence. The absence of accessible and effective remedies, particularly when it comes to addressing violence against children, likely results in significant underreporting, which further enables perpetrators to continue harming children. The right to have access to mechanisms to seek redress for violence and to prevent it from continuing functions harmoniously with other rights of children and requires cooperation across sectors including justice, health, education, and social services (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019).

In 2003, the UN CRC Committee constructed General Comment 5 (GC 5), which addresses the general measures of CRC implementation. In GC 5, paragraph 24, the

Committee states, "[f]or rights to have meaning, effective remedies must be available to redress violations (2006)". The child's right to access effective remedies when/if their rights have been violated is a core right underpinning children's access to justice (Leifaard, 2019). Access to effective remedies against violence has been cited as a basic starting point for ending violence against children and a necessary component for preventing it. "Failing to deliver redress to a child for a human rights violation is a particularly telling sign that a legal system or a society is falling short of regarding children as rights-bearers (CRIN, 2016, p. 4)." Therefore, in order to fully implement children's rights, especially the rights of child victims, a wide range of actions must be taken to respond to the actual or perceived threat of violence, and these actions should be quantifiable and measured by founding European Union States.

Promising Practices

Child-Friendly Justice

In recent years, there has been a growing interest by international and regional organizations seeking to reform judicial systems designed for adults in a way that is adapted to the rights of children. Despite increasing attention by international and regional child rights organizations, the child's right to access to justice has yet to be conceptualized or contextualized in academic research. Children's access to justice can be viewed as a right and a procedural concept, and thus, "[i]t implies legal empowerment of children and access to justice mechanisms and remedies that are child-sensitive" (Liefaard, 2019, p. 195). Apart from the CRC, the support for establishing justice systems sensitive to needs and interests of children has been further supported by the introduction

of the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child Friendly Justice in 2010. According to the Guidelines, child-friendly justice:

> *[R]efers to justice systems which guarantee the respect and effective implementation of all children's rights at the highest attainable level… It is, in particular, justice that is accessible, age appropriate, speedy, diligent, adapted to and focused on the needs and rights of the child, respecting the rights of the child including the rights to due process, to participate in and to understand the proceedings, to respect for private and family life and to integrity and dignity.*
>
> (Council of Europe on Child Friendly Justice, 2010)

A number of proposals/directives throughout the EU have integrated the elements of child-friendly justice into their development. It is important to note that the guidelines are not an effort to create or establish new laws or policies, but rather build on the existing human rights principles detailed in international human rights laws, especially the UNCRC (Tuite, 2013). Within the context of child victims and witnesses, CRC General Comment state the following:

> *62. The child victim and child witness of a crime must be given the opportunity to fully exercise her or his right to freely express her or his view in accordance with United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/20, "Guidelines on Justice Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime".*
>
> *63. In particular, this means that every effort has to be made to ensure that a child victim or/and witness is consulted on the relevant matters with regard to involvement in the case under scrutiny, and enabled to express freely, and in her*

or his own manner, views and concerns regarding her or his involvement in the judicial process.

64. The right of the child victim and witness is also linked to the right to be informed about issues such as availability of health, psychological and social services, the role of a child victim and/or witness, the ways in which "questioning" is conducted, existing support mechanisms in place for the child when submitting a complaint and participating in investigations and court proceedings, the specific places and times of hearings, the availability of protective measures, the possibilities of receiving reparation, and the provisions for appeal.

(CRC General Comment 13, 2011, paragraphs 62-64)

The CFJ (Child Friendly Justice) Guidelines provide detailed guidance for the implementation of child-friendly justice before, during and after judicial proceedings, which include criminal, civil and administrative law. The primary aim is to ensure that the rights of all children are recognized throughout the judicial process, while also balancing the rights of all other parties. Relevant to the judicial process, key terms are defined. The definition of *child* is anyone under 18 years of age. The definition is in line with Article 1 of the CRC and Article 1.1 of the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (ETS No. 160). The term *parent* is defined as any individual deemed responsible for the care of the child such as biological parents, guardians and/or legal representatives. Lastly, the term *child-friendly justice*, defined in paragraph c., expands to a number of professionals within different sectors, such as police, social, and mental

health workers—all of which have responsibilities for enabling child-sensitive measures throughout the judicial process.

To guide the judicial process, a core principle of the CRC, the UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime, and the COE Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice, the best interests of the child is the primary consideration in any and all decisions affecting the child. Within the judicial context, all professionals, including police, judges, and attorneys are to prioritize the best interests of the child, whether they be a victim, witness, or suspect, during all stages of the proceedings. In doing so, the necessary actions related to the potential developmental and psychological impacts and the overall protection of the child can be better secured. The COE Guidelines on CFJ further emphasize the importance of the best interest principle in combination with other rights of the child such as the right to be heard and the right to be protected from violence. This is further realized in practice through a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to child protection. Given these guidelines for the implementation of child-friendly justice before during and after judicial proceedings, the European Union should have a systematic tool to measure the degree to which states prioritize the principle of 'the best interests of the child' during all stages of judicial proceedings.

Related to judicial proceedings, international organizations working in the field of children's rights recognize that children are often discriminated against due to their age and capacity—this occurs when existing systems, individuals, and mechanisms do not recognize the child as a bearer of rights. As stated above, in CRC Article 12, every child shall be allowed to express their views and participate in all matters affecting them. This

right should not be hindered by the age of the child. Therefore, and again, provisions for enabling the child's right to participate, which includes access to information and the right to have their voices heard in public and private life, has been increasingly recognized as necessary component for safeguarding their rights within the judicial context. For example, the UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime state that age shall not be a barrier for children to participate throughout the judicial process. Children develop and mature at different paces and stages. It is therefore recommended that all individuals under 18 years of age be granted the opportunity to exercise their rights and effectively participate in criminal proceedings.

In addition to child-friendly justice, the US-based Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) and European Barnahus are internationally recognized models of this approach, which provide comprehensive and integrated services for victims in one child-friendly facility. Expansion of the CAC's and Barnahus' "one-stop shop" approach has contributed to the following: (1) enhanced likelihood of disclosure and testimony validity, (2) strengthened quality of investigations and interagency cooperation, (3) increased victim and family satisfaction, (4) improved access to mental and physical health services, and (5) increased prosecution and conviction rates. The co-location of services in one child-friendly facility creates an environment that properly addresses the concerns of victims and their families, while also supporting the multiple sectors involved. Therefore, this "best practice" is a promising strategy that would better assist law enforcement, courts, medical, and social service agencies in achieving their desirable outcomes in cases of violence against children, while also serving as a mechanism to prevent these crimes from occurring in the future. As such, the European Union should

have a systematic tool to measure the availability or degree to which nations are implementing a "one-stop shop" approach. Because this "one-stop shop" approach is particularly important to VAC and has been found to be an evidence-based practice, below I describe in more detail the approach as it is implemented in the successful Barnahus model.

The European Barnahus (Children's House)

The European *Barnahus* model is identified by many scholars and practitioners as a "best practice" to overcome existing response barriers through a comprehensive and collective system designed for children. The framework possesses measurable and noteworthy benefits for participating systems (Johansson et al., 2017; Diesen, 2002). Given the differences in national contexts, legal systems, and social structures, many European nations have utilized the Barnahus framework to enhance their existing justice and child welfare systems. Evaluations of CAC, Barnahus, and similar models demonstrate its value in addressing the problems inherent to agency responses to VAC (Johansson et al., 2017; Diesen, 2002). Ideally, with the proper support, this model can be adapted to the national contexts of EU countries to enhance responses to child abuse throughout the region. The Council of Europe (2018) defines Barnahus as follows:

> *The term Barnahus/MDIA services for child victims and witnesses of violence is generally defined as a child-friendly, safe environment for children, bringing together relevant services under one roof for the purposes of providing the child a coordinated and effective response for preventing re-traumatization during investigation and court proceedings.*

Similar to the Children's Advocacy Centers in the US, a key component of the model is that all services are offered under one roof. Studies using evidence-based methods have proven that with the appropriate conditions, environment, and support, children are able to disclose pertinent information about their victimization. This "one stop shop" is a comprehensive approach that ensures all needs of the victim and involved agencies are met in a timely and efficient manner. Although existing models vary in structure, they tend to share the same common criteria (Wenke, 2014-2020).

Common Criteria:

1. Forensic interviews conducted under evidence-based protocol;
2. Evidentiary validity of the child's statement;
3. Medical evaluation for forensic investigative purposes and to ensure child's physical well-being and recovery;
4. Psychological support with short and long-term therapeutic services for child and family;
5. Assessment of protection needs of victim.

The Barnahus environment caters specifically to child victims. Rooms are designed in a way that is inviting, comforting, and child-friendly. The facility is divided into four separate rooms, each of which are utilized for the purpose: (1) medical examinations, (2) mental health, (3) forensic interviewing, and (4) child protection/social services. The idea is that all agencies and services meet the child in one location to complete their designated tasks. The majority of Barnahus facilities utilize this framework and follow the same standards of operation (Haldorsson, 2017).

Children's Advocacy Centers and Barnahus were created to coordinate better responses to cases of child abuse. Both models share similar goals, standards, and principles. Country context, structures, and systemic approaches are key differences between the models (Yanchuck et al., 2016). The CAC model utilizes a child protection approach, which has a more restricted focus of targeting specifically child abuse victims. In contrast, the Nordic Barnahus model, implemented in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, utilizes a family service approach, which focuses on the needs of not only the victim, but provides directed support for the entire family (Johansson et al., 2017). However, the structure and oversight of these centers vary based on the context of each country. Central coordination, involved agencies, target populations, and legal provisions differ even among Nordic states, resulting in a diversity of models. Therefore, the European Barnahus model is essentially a guided, yet flexible framework that can be tailored to the specific needs of each country (Yanchuck et al., 2016; Johansson et al., 2017). This enables the widespread adaptation of Barnahus, regardless of legal, economic, or cultural contexts.

The development of the European Barnahus (Children's House) was inspired by the framework of U.S. Children's Advocacy Centers (Johansson et al., 2017) Prior to Barnahus, there was a significant lack of awareness regarding the true prevalence of childhood violence and exploitation. For example, in 1997, the publication of a series of studies on incidences of sexual abuse throughout the region indicated prevalence rates to be higher than expected. This subsequently triggered the development of better responses to cases of sexual violence against children. As a result, the first Barnahus was

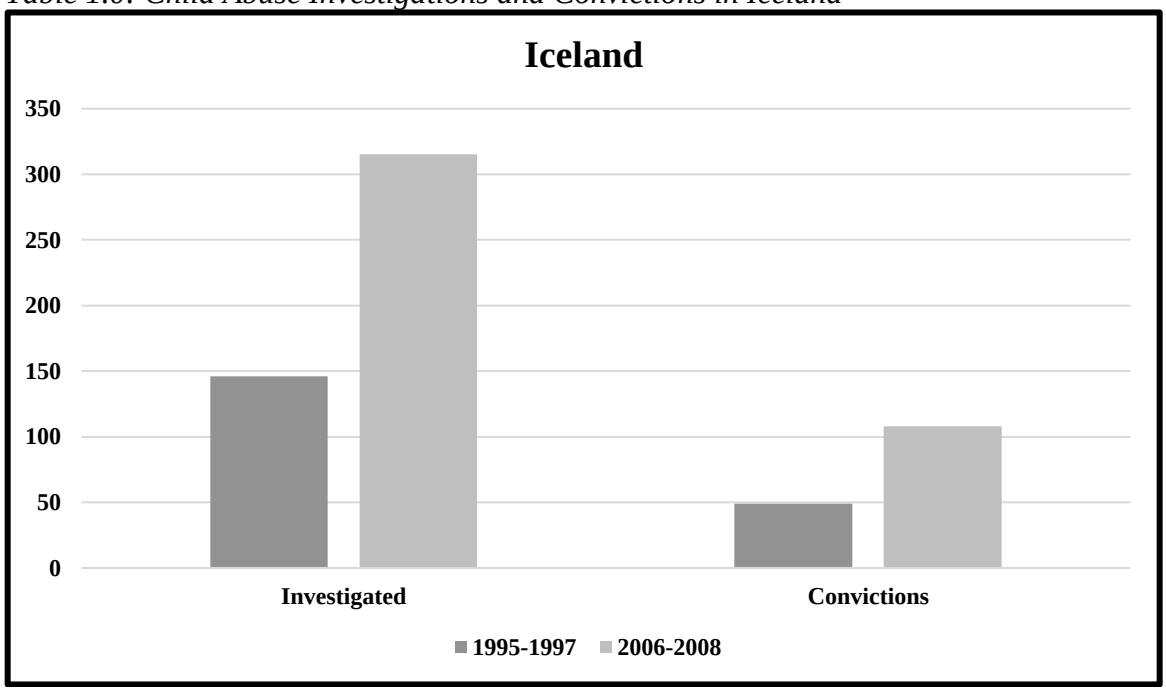
implemented in Iceland in 1998. The model was soon replicated throughout the Scandinavian region (Johansson et al., 2017).

In the following sections, I review the status of Barnahus/Children's Houses in Iceland, Sweden, and Norway to illustrate how such models may be beneficial in addressing existing gaps in child protection policy and practice, and to also identify key areas in need for improvement.

Iceland

The Barnahus evidence base is still limited to individual country evaluations, which are rarely published in English. However, there is data that indicates Barnahus to be a promising approach, with potential to produce outcomes similar to that of the CAC in the United States. Between 1998 and 2014, approximately 4,000 cases have been referred to Iceland's Barnahus. In recent years, referral rates average between 250 and 300 per year (Radford, Allnock, & Hynes, 2015; Goubrandsson, 2013). Investigations of suspected abuse and conviction rates in Iceland also increased. The number of cases investigated doubled, from 146 referrals between 1995 and 1997, to 315 referrals between 2006 and 2008. This trend is also reflected in the number of secured convictions, with 49 convictions from 1995 to 1997, to 108 in 2006 to 2008. In addition, 86 percent of child victims believed the Barnahus environment was beneficial for conducting interviews, whereas only 42 percent report being satisfied with courthouse interviews (Goubrandsson, 2013).

Table 1.0: Child Abuse Investigations and Convictions in Iceland



Sweden

Sweden implemented a series of six Barnahus pilot projects in 2006, which soon expanded to over 25 locations throughout the country (Johansson, 2012). In general, implementation of Barnahus in Sweden has contributed to increased support and satisfaction for child victims, better quality of investigations, and improvement in prosecution processes (Radford, Allnock, & Hynes, 2015). The first evaluation conducted in 2008 identified a number of areas needing improvement in order to meet the Barnahus standards. However, it also provided evidence that the Barnahus setting achieved the desired child-friendly environment for dealing with child victims. It was also determined that Barnahus established a better overall environment for investigation procedures than police stations (Rejmer & Astrom, 2008).

By 2010, the Swedish Barnahus made significant progress toward improving coordination and case outcomes. Information sharing and cooperation across agencies,

between social services and law enforcement in particular, improved significantly, resulting in better investigations and evidence. Medical examinations and mental health referrals also increased, which likely contributed to increased prosecution rates and satisfaction of victims and families (Kaldal, Diesen, Jeije, & Diesen, 2010). By 2013, the majority of Barnahus maintained high quality standards but are encouraged to continue on-going development (Landeberg & Svedin, 2013). The overall progress of the Swedish Barnahus continues to be evaluated to identify indicators of success, as well as areas in need of improvement.

Norway

Norway's Barnahus structure differs from their Scandinavian counterparts, primarily because it is organized under the supervision of the Chief of Police, anchored within the Department of Justice (Johansson et al., 2017) "…the link to the police system has given the Children's House model a much-needed legitimacy in the foundation phase" (Stefansen, Gundersen, & Bakketeig, 2012, p. 12). Upon the expansion of locations in Sweden, seven additional Barnahus were piloted in Norway (Johansson, 2012). The nationwide adaptation of the model was essentially triggered by the Norwegian Government's Action Plan Against Domestic Violence (2008-2011) and the realization that existing responses to child abuse cases was overall inadequate (Oslo Children's House, 2015). As a result, a total of ten *Statens Barnehus* have been established since 2008.

Stefansen, Gundersen, and Bakketeig (2012) evaluated six out of seven Norway centers from 2007 to 2009. Initial findings demonstrated the need for better guidelines to identify the role and tasks of professionals during preparation, interview, and follow-up

procedures. However, children, parents, police, and legal professionals reported overall positive experiences with the centers. In addition,72 percent of police and legal respondents believed the use of Statens Barnehus should be required in all police investigations involving child victims (Stefansen, Gundersen, & Bakketeig, 2012). Norway centers conducted over 3,500 forensic interviews and 750 medical examinations since September 2009. In 2013 alone, 870 children were provided forensic interviews, 513 for violence-related cases and 269 for sexual abuse cases. Approximately half of these cases received follow-up support (Oslo Children's House, 2015). As a result, Statens Barnehus are now recognized and valued as an integral tool for overcoming barriers of investigation and court procedures, while maintaining the best interests of victims.

The premise of Barnahus is to match justice and child welfare systems by providing child-friendly, multidisciplinary, and interagency services for child victims of abuse under one roof. In doing so, agencies are better equipped to obtain valid evidence without imposing further harm or trauma to the child. Although structures and procedures vary cross-nationally, key criteria and standards tend to remain constant.

Efforts to establish Barnahus have spread beyond the Scandinavian region and are now in progress in Turkey, Lithuania, Portugal, Poland, Germany, and England (Radford, Allnock & Hynes, 2015). Increasing adaptation of this framework throughout Europe suggests countries have begun to recognize the importance of collectively safeguarding the child by improving efficiency of justice processes and enhancing support services for victims. Furthermore, in order for there to be change in existing policies and programs, is

important to understand the status of such efforts throughout the region to set a baseline for reform.

This research demonstrates the potential for integrated responses to better address the needs of child victims and witnesses. However, literature examining integrated responses to child abuse, especially as it relates to child-friendly investigation and judicial procedures remains limited. In addition, there remains a gap in research examining how well countries perform across the spectrum of responses to violence against children. This includes not only laws, but also prevention efforts, detection and investigation, and judicial procedures. Therefore, in the forthcoming section, I explore recent developments in the area of child rights indicators, with a particular focus on how various rights and protections have been operationalized by other scholars. This, essentially, serves as a methodological literature review, which further assists in the methodological decision making I use to develop my own composite index in Chapter 4.

Developments in Child Rights Indicators Research

While it is rather simple to determine whether a national government has ratified an international convention, it is more challenging to gauge the extent to which efforts have been made to implement a specific right and whether child-related outcomes have been achieved in doing so. As Gran (2017) states, "[i]dentifying decoupling of children's rights policies from practices is a significant research goal" (p. 94). The ratification of international treaties, such as the CRC, does not fully capture the strength of government commitment to improve the situation of vulnerable children's rights. As a result, many researchers have begun to examine and measure government performance in ensuring the

rights and protection of children through the development and application of composite indicators and indices (Gran, 2017; Vaghri et al., 2019; Sethi et al., 2018).

In the next section, I provide an in-depth examination of the current state of child rights indicators research within and across disciplinary fields. I first identify common indicators and measurements used to assess the implementation and advancement of children's rights, in general, and across the globe. I then shift focus towards common indicators and measures of specific rights of children, particularly within the context of violence against children. Following a rights-based approach, I examine current trends and theoretical explanations for country performance in ending violence against children. The aim is to identify similarities and differences in how children's rights are comparatively measured and evaluated. This provides a foundational basis for the development and construction of the proposed child-friendly protection index, which is grounded in the empirical and theoretical work of scholars across the globe.

Measuring Children's Rights

Composite indicators have been increasingly recognized as a tool for monitoring country progress in implementing human rights. Within this context, researchers often incorporate three types of indicators to measure performance: *structure, process,* and *outcome* (Gran, 2017). In 2012, the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) developed methods for constructing composite indicators/indices and recommended that researchers focus on two central questions: (1) Are governments, as duty bearers, upholding their obligations under ratified human rights treaties and, (2) Are children, as rights holders, enjoying the fulfillment of their rights (Vaghri et al., 2019). To address the role of governments as duty bearers, indicators

should reflect the structures and processes in place to support various rights, while children's level of rights fulfillment should include indicators of child-related outcomes (Vaghri et al., 2012; Vaghri et al., 2019). However, existing literature shows significant variances in the way child rights indicators and indices are structured, developed, and measured. While there continues to be a lack of consensus as to what constitutes the best approach, prior research can nevertheless be used to guide in the construction of composite indices, inform measurement choices and indicator selection, and assist in explaining variances within and across indicators/domains.

As an illustration of prior research serving as guidance to my approach, Kim and Yoo (2015) comparatively examined the level of children's rights implementation within the context of wealthy countries. The researchers constructed a child rights index (CRI) to examine (1) how national governments have made efforts to ensure children's rights, (2) how such efforts cover the basic needs of children, and (3) how efforts affect the present condition. Three domains were selected to measure the advancement in children's rights in three areas: the right to health, the right to welfare, and the right to education. They then examined the relationships between the country's level of child rights achievement and economic growth, economic equality, and ratification of relevant human rights treaties. Their findings suggest that more advanced welfare countries, with lower levels of inequality, were more likely to have higher achievement of child rights. Although not statistically significant, they also found that the ratification of human rights treaties may impact child rights implementation within the country when the treaty is narrowly and precisely defined (Kim and Yoo, 2015). From a policy perspective, this research supports the notion that inequality within society likely produces inequality in

child rights and negatively impacts the advancement of children's rights as a whole. This study, however, focused solely on economically prosperous countries, leaving room to question whether such findings can apply to less-developed countries.

Other studies have suggested that the economic and developmental level of a country can impact their level of child rights implementation. Within the context of child rights and well-being, another comparative study conducted by Nicklett and Perron (2010) examined the extent to which countries have implemented laws and policies to support the rights and wellbeing of children. As stated prior, the CRC details several provisions and standards for promoting and maintaining the welfare of children (see pages 14-20 above). The study systematically analyzed the extent to which least-developed countries (LDC) and middle-income countries (MIC) have implemented laws to support these CRC standards (Nicklett & Perron, 2010). The researchers sought to answer the following questions: (1) What general policies and laws related to child rights and welfare have been enacted? (2) How do LDCs and MICs differ in their degree of implementation? Focusing on provisions related to family assistance, prevention of separation, maintenance of family ties, preference of family care over institutional care, and participation of children in placement decisions, the researchers conducted a series of Chi-square and Fisher exact tests to examine differences in country responses. Nicklett & Perron's findings suggest that LDC countries have a lower implementation rate than MICs, likely due to the lack of various human, economic, and organizational resources. The scope of this research, however, does not address the types of resources likely impacting child rights implementation, nor does it focus specifically on aspects of child rights within the context of protection from violence.

Table 2.0: Child Rights v. Child Well-being Indicators

	Child Rights Indicators	Child Well-Being Indicators
Framework	Measuring implementation of the state's child rights obligations under international law	Measuring progress toward what is desired, as expressed in policy outcomes or otherwise
Context	Examines the interaction between children, the state, and society	Reveals the 'state' of children's lives
Emphasis	Strengthening the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights and duty bearers to fulfill their rights	Improving knowledge to ensure children achieve their full potential
Types of Data	Use of qualitative and quantitative data	Primarily uses quantitative but an include qualitative
Data Analysis	Disaggregation of data to identify how different groups are faring is imperative	Disaggregation of data becoming more common
Voices of Children	Obtaining views of the child is essential	The integration of subjective well-being is emerging

Adapted from Kennan et al., 2011, p. 16

KidsRights Index

In this sub-section, I examine a well-known rights-based index known as the KidsRights Index. I primarily focus on the authors' methodological choices in selecting and quantifying indicator and domains. I then provide a critical analysis of the index by identifying various strengths and weakness. Focusing primarily on European countries, I explore how each country is ranked overall, scored overall, and scored across domains.

The KidsRights Index, first published in 2013, provides a global ranking of country performance in adhering to children's rights. Using the index, countries have been ranked every year since 2013. The most recent year being 2017. This composite index is comprised of five domains: (1) Right to Life, (2) Right to Health, (3) Right to Education, (4) Right to Protection, and (5) Enabling Environment for Child Rights. The researchers pooled data from two principal sources: quantitative data published by UNICEF and qualitative data published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, principally from the 'Concluding Observations' reports. Country performance within each of the five domains was measured based on a set of 16 quantitative and seven

qualitative indicators. Definitions of each of the indicators within the KidsRights Index are provided below.

Domain 5 *Enabling Environment for Child Rights* (i.e., 'Child Rights Environment'), consists of qualitative indicators from, as already mentioned, the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (or UNCRC). The researchers scored countries based on a scale from 1 to 3, where a score of 1 means only negative remarks and 3 equals only positive remarks. The KidsRights Index measures this domain based on the aggregate score of the aforementioned indicators, which sheds light on the extent to which the country is equipped to carry out the core principles of the UNCRC. In other words, the extent to which the country has operationalized the core principles of the UNCRC. Data for the 'Child Rights Environment' domain is comprised of the following indicators:

1. Non-discrimination *(Article 2)*
2. Best interests of the child *(Article 3)*
3. Respect for the views of the child/child participation *(Article 12)*
4. Enabling legislation *(Article 4)*
5. Best available budget *(Article 4)*
6. Collection and analysis of disaggregated data *(implied in Article 4)*
7. State-civil society cooperation for child rights

In the above table of the 2017 KidsRights Index, 27 of the 28 EU member states are included and analyzed (data for Poland is either missing or incomplete). Scoring for each of the five domains is valued between 0 and 1, where 1 equals the best situation and 0 equals the worst. The overall score is calculated based on the mean score of all five

domains. Within the European context, Portugal, Spain, France, Sweden, and Finland are the top-ranked countries, while Italy, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and the UK rank the lowest.

Table 3.0: EU Kids Rights Index Rankings 2017.

COUNTRY	OVERALL RANK	OVERALL SCORE	LIFE	HEALTH	EDUCATION	PROTECTION	CHILD RIGHTS ENVIRONMENT
Portugal	1	0.932	0.970	0.995	0.823	0.965	0.917
Spain	5	0.902	0.986	0.986	0.749	0.984	0.833
France	6	0.900	0.981	0.959	0.851	0.983	0.750
Sweden	7	0.875	0.984	0.992	0.791	0.996	0.667
Finland	10	0.862	0.973	0.983	0.670	0.988	0.750
Belgium	11	0.858	0.968	0.982	0.774	0.985	0.643
Slovenia	12	0.858	0.967	0.973	0.695	0.994	0.714
Netherlands	15	0.849	0.976	0.974	0.699	0.994	0.667
Malta	17	0.843	0.960	0.954	0.640	0.969	0.750
Germany	18	0.836	0.970	0.985	0.620	0.987	0.700
Romania	19	0.835	0.888	0.878	0.659	0.924	0.857
Croatia	24	0.821	0.934	0.916	0.696	x	0.714
Cyprus	26	0.819	0.965	0.958	0.687	0.995	.0583
Latvia	30	0.813	0.894	0.936	0.557	0.970	0.786
Bulgaria	32	0.812	0.890	0.924	0.706	0.910	0.667
Denmark	34	0.807	0.964	0.963	0.740	0.999	0.500
Austria	35	0.806	0.976	0.986	0.539	0.985	0.667
Ireland	41	0.797	0.970	0.924	0.873	0.984	0.417
Hungary	44	0.793	0.908	0.993	0.724	0.961	0.500
Luxembourg	56	0.774	0.981	0.993	0.690	0.990	0.417
Czech Republic	57	0.774	0.949	0.987	0.529	0.979	0.571
Greece	64	0.763					
Italy	83	0.727	0.993	0.935	0.736	0.991	0.300
Estonia	93	0.701	0.932	0.961	0.684	0.968	0.286
Lithuania	103	0.678	0.893	0.930	0.709	0.973	0.250
Slovakia	107	0.663	0.918	0.978	0.520	0.957	0.286
United Kingdom	156	0.377	0.966	0.978	0.844	0.959	0.010
Poland	X	X	0.935	0.964	0.684	0.973	X

These findings shed light on the extent to which children's rights are realized and enabled within each country. However, apart from 'enabling child rights environment' dimension, indicator groups focus primarily on outcomes for children, rather than structural and process indicators. The domain for child protection, for example, consists of three indicators measuring the percentage of child labor, adolescent birth rate, and birth registration. In addition, the *right to protection* domain does not fully capture the extent to which countries have implemented laws, policies, or measures to protect, prevent, or respond to various forms of violence.

Measuring Child Protection

As stated prior, although there has been growing interest in the development of composite measures to assess child rights implementation in general, existing child rights-related indicators solemnly address the multiple aspects of a specific right, such as the right to be protected from violence, and the linkages between other rights-related indicators. Despite the existence of guidelines, treaties, and provisions governing the rights of children to live free from violence, few studies have operationalized the various aspects of child protection and safeguarding measures as a whole. Of the few studies, Svevo-Cianci and colleagues (2010) assessed the level of implementation of CRC Article 19 by examining the extent to which states have established a variety of child protection measures. Svevo-Cianci et al. (2010) used the child rights in practice accountability model as the guiding framework for the study, which categorizes child protection based on three key domains: mandate, intervention, and child outcome. The first domain, *mandate,* includes indicators related to government commitment, regulation, and support. The *intervention* domain covers indicators such as data monitoring, child protection strategies, and services. The third domain measures a variety of *child-related outcomes* (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010).

Svevo-Cianci and her colleagues' (2010) study examined child protection measures based on (1) social policy and legislation mandates establishing prevention of violence and protection of child victims and (2) child maltreatment mechanisms/interventions such as data collection/surveillance, mental health, and social support services, awareness and prevention campaigns, reporting systems, social services, training of professionals and budgetary allocations to implement child protection

measures detailed in Article 19. The researchers found that the combination of child protection infrastructure along with information-based interventions contributes to more successful child protection. These findings suggest that the establishment of child protection measures cannot be implemented in isolation but require a holistic approach to be most effective in protecting children from violence. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the fact that partial measures for protecting children from violent victimization are not effective in ensuring the protection of all children in every country (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010).

In another study, Ager and colleagues (2011) sought to construct a National Child Protection Index template based on several critical indicators and domains. The construction of this index relied heavily on the guidance and input from professionals working in fields of child rights and protection. The main objective of the study was to identify critical indicators relevant for mapping child protection systems, which was then piloted at the national level in Indonesia and the sub-national level in Uganda. The indicators and domains comprising Ager and colleagues' (2011) National Child Protection Index Report are as follows[2]:

- Demographics
- Protection Concerns
    - Separated children
    - Orphaned children
    - Trafficked children
    - Children with disabilities

[2] The bullet points I provide for the National Child Protection Index Report will be converted to table format, similar to what I did for the Kids Rights Index, for my final dissertation.

    - Child rape
    - Children engaging in the worst forms of child labor
    - *Specific country concerns*
        - Child sexual abuse
        - Violent deaths in children

- Laws and Policy
    - *International:*
        - UNCRC
        - Optional protocol: Sale of children
        - Optional protocol: Armed conflict
        - ILO Convention No. 138: Minimum age convention
        - ILO Convention No. 182: Worst forms of child labor
    - *National:*
        - Minimum age for work
        - Minimum age for criminal responsibility
        - Corporal punishment prohibited in schools
        - Corporal punishment prohibited in the penal system
        - Poverty reduction strategies in place addressing children's situation
        - Integration of child protection with emergency preparedness
        - Mechanisms established to monitor the progress of implementation of CRC

- Services and Systems
    - Social workers per 100,000 population
    - Existence of children's ombudspeople
    - (Primary) school fees
    - Existence of parenting and other response programs
    - Existence of a child friendly juvenile justice system
    - Existence of relevant health facilities for children affected by HIV
    - Teacher/Student ratio
    - Children in detention
    - Children in institutional care
    - Percentage of separated children reunified

The researchers emphasize the need for better routine data collection, especially within the field of child protection. In addition, the template aimed to examine the strength and availability of data covering the child protection sector as well as government accountability and commitment to the CRC (Ager et al., 2011). However, the application of this template in other countries may be difficult, as many countries lag in proper data collection methods. In addition, the services and systems domains are primarily comprised of quantitative indicators. The existence of child protection measures, such as those defined by Svevo-Cianci et al. (2010) are not included. In addition, the indicator related to child friendly justice is not clearly defined, which can be problematic, as child-friendly justice is not a simple term that can be condensed into a single indicator.

Out of the Shadows Index

In 2020, the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research and analysis division of The Economist Group, developed the *Out of the Shadows Index;* a benchmarking index that evaluates how various stakeholders respond to the issue of child sexual abuse and exploitation in 60 countries. Countries were scored on a scale from 0 to 100, where the highest possible score of 100 indicates the best responses to protect and acknowledge the problem of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The index comprised of four dimensions in which responses take place: *(1) environment, (2) legal framework, (3) government commitment and capacity, and (4) engagement of industry, civil society, and media.*

A total of 60 countries were selected for the benchmarking index, six of which were EU member states: United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Italy, France, and Romania. The United Kingdom was ranked the top performer in responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation, followed by Sweden, which ranked second overall. Germany placed fifth, Italy eighth, France ninth, and Romania ranked 27 out of 60 total countries.

Although promising, the coverage of the Out of the Shadows index is limited to only six EU member states. In addition, the index only addresses specific forms of child *sexual* abuse and exploitation. Other forms of VAC, such as physical abuse, harmful traditional practices, and child labor, are not accounted for. Finally, the index does not delve into safeguarding provisions for child victims during investigations and judicial proceedings. Although complex, these omitted areas are critical for understanding the extent to which countries protect, prevent, and respond to the spectrum of problems intrinsically linked to the realization of the child's right to be protected from violence.

Global Report on Access to Justice for Children (2015)

This sub-section examines a different, yet equally important component of responding to VAC. Apart from existence of laws and various child welfare components, child victims and witnesses must be able to receive effective remedies when harm has been caused. The right to an effective remedy is closely linked to access to justice. From a child rights-based perspective, legal systems should provide children with means to challenge rights violations and empower them to exercise their rights when violated (CRIN, 2016). In 2016, the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) published the most comprehensive review examining the extent to which the child's right to an effective remedy is secured in national legal systems. This global report, covering 197 countries, ranked countries based on four indicator groups: (1) legal status of the CRC, (2) legal status of the child, (3) remedies, and (4) practicalities (CRIN, 2016). The third indicator group, remedies, measures the extent to which children are protected by national legal systems, focusing specifically on the strength and existence of various courts and complaint mechanisms. Furthermore, the fourth indicator group measures the extent to which children are protected throughout judicial proceedings including access to legal advice and aid, courtroom provisions to protect them from intimidation and secondary trauma, and efforts to avoid undue delay (CRIN, 2016).

Subsequently, the researchers developed a comprehensive scorecard for each aspect of children's access to justice as well as an interactive map to visualize these sets of rights at the global level. Within the EU context, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Finland, and the Netherlands are ranked as top performers in children's access to justice. Lowest performers within the EU include Malta, Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic, Cyprus,

and Ireland (CRIN, 2016). Country rankings of children's access to justice in EU member states are detailed in the table below.

Table 4.0: Children's Access to Justice in Europe.

COUNTRY	GLOBAL RANK	COUNTRY SCORE (out of 261)	% SCORE
Belgium	1	213	81.6
Portugal	2	201.5	77.2
Spain	3	201	77
Finland	4	199.5	76.4
Netherlands	5	198.5	76.1
Luxembourg	6	197.5	75.7
Latvia	9	191.5	73.4
UK (England & Wales)	10	190.5	73
UK (Northern Ireland)	18	183.5	70.3
Slovenia	20	181	69.3
France	21	180	69
Poland	23	177.5	68
Croatia	24	177	67.8
Lithuania	24	177	67.8
Estonia	27	176	67.4
Bulgaria	32	173.5	66.5
Greece	32	173.5	66.5
Romania	37	170.5	65.3
Hungary	40	169	64.8
Slovakia	45	164.5	63
Denmark	46	164	62.8
Italy	47	163.5	62.6
Cyprus	49	162.5	62.3
Ireland	49	162.5	62.3
Czech Republic	53	160	61.3
Sweden	54	159.5	61.1
Germany	66	153.5	58.8
Malta	116	119	45.6

This index sheds light on an aspect of children's rights that is often overlooked, access to justice. There are also limited composite indices examining children's access to justice. While promising, this index has more of a broad focus on the role and rights of children within the context of judicial procedures. However, it does not focus solely on the role of child victims, nor does it fully examine the context of child abuse or violence against children. This remains an area in need of further examination and measurement.

Measuring Child-Friendliness of Governments

In 2009, the African Child Policy forum was one of the first to develop an approach to measure government performance in realizing the rights of children and their

well-being. The researchers developed a composite index to quantify how well African governments were performing in meeting their international and national obligations to children by assessing and ranking governments based on a set of common indicators. Although the initial African Child-Friendliness Index (CFI) has been revamped for purposes of quality and scope, the conceptual framework and methodology have remained the same.

According to Mekonen (2009), a child-friendly government is defined "… one which is making the maximum effort to meet its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill child rights and ensure child wellbeing." This formal definition provides a conceptual framework for the measurement of African governments. Efforts of governments are measured based on the laws and policies that have been adopted, the allocation of resources, and the achievement of child-related outcomes.

Mekonen (2009) provides a detailed description of the methodological framework and approach for the development of the CFI. The method to measure government performance is first informed by the 3-Ps approach, which groups CRC rights into three clusters: protection, provision, and participation rights. They focus on how well states comply with CRC obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights of the child.

The CFI measurement and development follows a rights-based approach. A child-rights based approach realizes children as active participants and holders of a number of universal human rights. It is the obligation of the state, as well as other individuals and institutions, to protect these rights as duty-bearers. The CFI measures government performance in realizing child rights by selecting an integrated set of more practical measures across different dimensions to cover all aspects of child rights.

The CRC covers the civic, political, social, economic, and cultural rights of children, each of which is universal and interrelated (Mekonen, 2009). Due to this interrelationship between rights and responsibilities, a multi-dimensional approach is required to account for the various rights and entitlements of children.

The phenomenon being measured by the CFI are governmental efforts (or inputs) channeled to benefit children, as well as the outcomes achieved in doing so. The researchers (2009) sourced indicators related to the following:

1. Laws, policies, and practices in place to protect children from exploitation and abuse
2. Financial resources to provide for the basic needs of children
3. Achievement of child-related outcomes
4. Efforts made to ensure the participation of children in decision-making processes that affect their well-being.

The identification of indicators was concept-driven, rather than data-driven. Indicators for each dimension of the CFI were selected based on the conceptual definition of *child-friendly government.* Indicators were grouped into three dimensions to measure the child-friendliness of African governments. However, due to a lack of reliable and available data, the third dimension (participation) was not covered in the initial phases of the CFI.

A. *Protection:* measured based on the legal and policy framework put into place.
B. *Provision:* measured through budgetary commitment and child-related outcomes.
C. *Participation*: n/a – not enough data was available to measure this dimension during the initial phases of the CFI.

Of the many composite indices explored, the African CFI methodology appears to be the most relevant to the goals and objectives of my newly developed composite index for this dissertation (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, the African index, along with India's Child Rights Index and South Asia's Child-Friendliness of Governments index possess similar conceptual frameworks and methodologies, which will serve as a foundation for the development of my Child Friendly Protection Index. However, as mentioned in previous sections, none of these indices solely focus on child victims or violence against children.

The India Child Rights Index (2011) applied a similar methodological approach to that of the African CFI and ranked sub-national states' efforts towards realizing the rights of the child. Indicators for this Child Rights Index covered aspects of birth registration, sex ratio, early childhood, child marriage, health, education, child labor, crimes against children, and crimes by children. The construction of this index followed the same methods of standardization, weighting, and aggregation as the CFI to rank the overall child-friendliness of Indian governments at the sub-national level. This was then replicated to create the overall National Child Rights Index.

Inspired by both the African and Indian composite indices, the South Asian Report on the Child-Friendliness of Governments was published in 2013. The child-friendliness of South Asian Governments was based on three composite indices. The first composite index covered the legal and policy framework of countries based on three indicator groups: general measures of implementation, the child's right to be heard, and the involvement of non-state actors. The second index covered provisions of child-related outcomes in areas of health, education, and child protection. The last composite index

evaluates the overall child-friendliness of South Asian governments and ranks countries based on the cumulative score from the enabling legal and policy framework and provision of child-related outcomes.

Although there has been increased interest in the development and use of composite indices to measure child-friendliness of governments, this approach has yet to be replicated in the European context. One study by Tarshish (2019) took a different conceptual and measurement approach to evaluate the child-friendliness of OECD countries. Taking more of a child development perspective, two sets of indicators, or sub-indices, were sourced covering aspects of nurturance and self-determination. The nurturance and care sub-index included child outcome indicators in domains related to health, material conditions, education, and protection, as well as budgetary commitments about children and families, a two-fold approach similar to that of Mekonen (2010) (Tarshish, 2019).

The sub-index of self-determination was based on aspects of child participation. Indicators covered child participation within the personal and public domains. This dimension expands beyond that of the African Child-Friendliness Index developed by Mekonen (2010) by including indicators of protection, provision, and participation. The researchers sought to understand how different groups of indicators within the sub-indices explain variations of child-friendliness and examine the correlations between the two indices, with the final aim to assess the level of child-friendliness in each country (Tarshish, 2019). Findings suggest that countries within the Nordic region (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, and Norway) rank highest in overall child-friendliness. In

contrast, the Czech Republic, Spain, Turkey, Korea, and Italy rank lowest (Tarshish, 2019).

Summary

Each of the aforementioned studies and indices that the researchers developed encompass various elements which have assisted in better understanding the current state of children's rights and protections. The ongoing discussion surrounding these issues is determining how exactly an *effective* child protection system is defined and measured. Per the CRC, it is ultimately the state's responsibility and obligation to uphold and protect children from violence which include various laws, policies, coordination mechanisms, regulation and monitoring. While each of these indices cover certain aspects of child protection, they do not provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which children are protected from various forms of violence or the extent to which they are protected throughout the investigative and judicial procedures once violence/abuse has been detected.

Given this, I aim to complete this picture by developing a composite index that focuses on the rights and protections of children before, during, and after violent victimization, across the spectrum of potential responses. In the following chapter I first provide the conceptual framework of my Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI), in which core domains and indicators are explained. Next, Chapter 4b provides the methodology for two phases of research; first for the CFPI construction, development, and assessment, and second for the analysis of variables external to the composite index.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

The Methodological Framework

The Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators: Methodology and User Guide (OECD, 2008) is used to inform construction and development of the composite index used in the present study. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) handbook, along with other scholarly work, identifies a number of advantages for developing composite indicators to measure country performance. Composite indicators are particularly useful for governments and policy makers and advocates to assess multidimensional and complex phenomenon and track such phenomenon over time (OECD, 2008). A well-developed composite index allows for the comparative analysis of country performance and progress in achieving certain goals and/or outcomes in a more simplified manner. In doing so, these indices not only facilitate discussion among relevant sectors and institutions, but also promote accountability in achieving child rights in different contexts (OECD, 2008).

Child-Friendly Protection Index Framework (CFPI)

The development of the CFPI is informed by a number of existing composite indices related to children's rights and well-being. More specifically, the African Child-Friendliness Index (CFI) serves as foundational framework for the construction of the present index. The researchers ranked the child-friendliness of governments based on two of the three core principles of the CRC: protection and provision. Although the CFI is a rather simplistic framework, it serves as a good starting point for the selection of indicators for the present study.

The first group of indicators measure the extent to which governments have made efforts to combat the issue of violence against children. The protection dimension is made up of ten (10) indicators that examine the legal and policy framework governments have put into place to protect children from violent victimization, particularly abuse and exploitation.

Domain 1: Government Commitment – Legal & Policy Framework

The first domain measures the extent to which national governments are committed to protecting the rights of children in EU member states. This domain seeks to capture the degree to which the country's legal framework acknowledges children's rights in general and provides comprehensive laws and policies to protect children from exposure to violent victimization both, directly and indirectly. In line with CRC Article 19 and General Comment 13, the protection dimension of the composite index examines how well EU member states are meeting their obligations to protect children from all forms of violence. The overall score of the protection dimension is based on the legal and policy framework in place within each EU member state.

Indicator Group 1: International/Regional Commitment (Structural Indicators)

The first group of indicators were selected to measure the extent to which national governments are committed to the rights and protections of children based on their status in ratifying key international and regional instruments related to children. Indicators of international commitment are grouped based on organization, i.e., United Nations, Council of Europe, International Labor Organization, etc. Variables and indicators measuring this component were compiled based on prior research measuring international

child rights commitment. The CFI framework measures international commitment which is based ratification of the following eight conventions:

- UNCRC (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child)
- ACRWC (African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Pornography
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children
  in Armed Conflict
- International Labor Organization Convention on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (ILO Convention No. 138)
- International Labor Organization Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO Convention No. 182)
- International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- The Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption

Because the ACRW only applies to African states, it is excluded from the CFPI framework. It includes the UNCRC, the two UN Optional Protocols, plus the more recently published Optional Protocol regarding children's involvement in communication procedures, reflecting a total of four UN Conventions. Both the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions are included in the measurement of international commitment. In addition, ten child-relevant Council of Europe (COE) conventions are included to measure government commitment to international and regional standards, which provides a total possible score of 16.

Table 5.0: International and Regional Commitment

Description	Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
Ratification/signatory status of international and regional instruments relating to children	United Nations (UN) Conventions	• UNCRC • Optional Protocol: Sale of Children • Optional Protocol: Children in Armed Conflict • Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons… • Optional Protocol: Communication Procedures	**__/5**
	Council of Europe (COE) Conventions	• Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms • European Social Charter (revised) • Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights • Budapest Convention (cyber crime) • Convention Against Trafficking of Human Beings • Lanzarote Convention • Istanbul Convention (combatting domestic violence) • Convention on Compensation to Victims of Violent Crime • Convention on Data Processing of Personal Data • Prevention of Torture, Degrading Treatment…	**___/10**
	International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions	• Convention on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (No. 138) • Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182)	**___/2**
			SUB-TOTAL SCORE : ____/17

Indicator Group 2: Domestic Laws

The second set of indicators is based on the legal framework within the country, primarily focusing on the extent to which various forms of violence and exploitation prohibited by law. The selection of indicators and variables are based on direct violence against children, such as maltreatment, as well as their exposure to violence, such as intimate partner violence. Indicators for this component include laws covering the following: child maltreatment, sexual violence, youth violence, and intimate partner violence. Government commitment to addressing issues of violence against children is therefore reflected by a total score of 16.

Table 6.0: Domestic Laws Regulating Violence and Exploitation

Description	Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
The extent to which national governments have prohibited/regulated all violence or exploitation against children at all times, in all settings	Child Maltreatment Laws	• Law against child marriage • Law against statutory rape • Law against female genital mutilation • Law against corporal punishment in all settings (n = 6 settings) • Minimum age for admission into employment (part-time) • Minimum age for admission into employment (full time) • Minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) • Minimum legal age to marry (male and female)	**__/8**
	Youth Violence Laws	• Law against weapons on school premises • Law against youth gang activity	**___/2**
The extent to which national governments have prohibited/regulated exposure to violence likely to impact children	Sexual Violence Laws	• Law against rape • Law against sexual violence contact (without rape) • Law against non-contact sexual violence • Minimum age for consent for sexual activity with an adult	**___/4**
	Intimate Partner Violence Laws (exposure to violence)	• Law against rape in marriage • Law allowing removal of violent spouse from the home	**___/2**
			SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ___/16

Indicator Group 3: Policy Framework

The next set of indicators measures government commitment to protection based on the existence/strength of various polices and/or action plans to address child protection issues. While the existence of laws is a critical step towards protecting the rights of children, it does not fully reflect whether or not governments are taking steps towards implementing such rights. Laws in the books, alone, are not a sufficient measure of how well protected children are within the country. Therefore, the existence of specific policies and actions plans can further capture the extent to which governments acknowledge the need for specific implementation measures in order to better protect the needs and rights of all children.

Table 7.0: Policy Framework Indicators

Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
Child Protection Policies	• Existence of a main legal instrument on child protection at the national level • Existence of a specific national policy framework (action plan or strategy) for child protection and/or child rights	**___/2**
Child Maltreatment Policies	• Policy for child maltreatment prevention • Policy for child maltreatment protection • Measurable targets • Funds to implement • Recognizes CM co-exists with other adverse childhood experiences • Recognizes the CM is a risk for developing health-risk behaviors	**___/6**
Violence/Injury Prevention Policies	• Policy/strategy for peer violence prevention • Policy/strategy for suicide/self-directed injury prevention	**___/2**
		SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ___/10

Domain 2: Prevention

The next dimension of the composite index examines the extent to which national governments have prioritized prevention. Prevention is measured based on the existence of programs and policies that aim to address issues of VAC before its occurrence, therefore reducing the likelihood of victimization and other negative childhood related outcomes. This domain includes a set of four indicators: social policy measures, social programs, educational measures, and awareness raising actions. The total possible score for indicators comprising the prevention domain is 19.

Table 8.0: Prevention Policy and Programming

Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
Social Policy Measures *The existence of social policy measures which aim at reducing various factors that put children at risk for victimization*	• National alcohol/drug policies related to children • Social policy includes support to children of parents with substance abuse problems • Incentives for high-risk youth to complete schooling • Housing policies to de-concentrate poverty	**___/4**
Social Programs *The existence of social programs that provide necessary support to children and caregivers.*	• Home visitation program focusing on families at risk for violence • Public health home visits for new parents includes child maltreatment prevention • Prenatal risk assessment of child maltreatment • Prenatal risk assessment of intimate partner violence	

	• Coordinated early childhood development program • Dedicated mental health services for children	**___/6**

Educational Measures	• Parenting education
	• Hospital-based parental training (abusive head trauma)
	• School related actions (6)
	  ○ Primary school-based program empowering children
	  ○ Mandatory life skills education
	  ○ Mandatory violence and sexual abuse prevention programming
	  ○ Health curriculum includes sexual/intimate partner abuse prevention
	  ○ Policy requiring school-based suicide prevention program
	  ○ School-based anti-bullying
		___/3

Awareness Raising Action	• National campaign on child maltreatment prevention • National campaign on peer violence prevention • Sustained national campaign on mental health targeting children • Sustained national campaign on depression and suicide prevention targeting older adolescents • Social and cultural norms change programs for intimate partner violence • Social and cultural norms change programs for sexual violence	**___/6**
		SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ___/19

Domain 3: Response and Intervention

The next dimension of the composite index examines the extent to which nations have implemented various provisions to support children's rights, with a particular focus on intervention and response mechanisms for addressing VAC. The primary focus of the composite indicators is to better understand the roles, capacities, mechanisms, and services in place to respond to the spectrum of issues related to violence against children. This domain is comprised of five indicator sets which examine the following critical elements of child-friendly social services: (1) identification and referral, (2) coordination, (3) training and accountability, (4) data collection and surveillance, and (5) child participation.

Table 9.0: National Child Protection Indicators

Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
Identification and Referral	• Identification of victims and referral for support by healthcare providers • Mandatory reporting of certain professionals • Mandatory reporting of civilians • Existence of child helpline • National protection system includes high-risk populations • Provisions on the right of the child placed in alternative care to issue complaints • Specific legal provisions requiring establishment of complaint mechanisms within alternative care • National legislation/policy regulating the protection of children living in care • Policy requiring risk assessment of suspected cases	**___/9**
Coordination	• Existence of national ombudsperson for children • Government department responsible for national coordination of violence prevention • Specific government lead for child maltreatment • Specific government lead for peer violence prevention • Specific government lead for suicide/self-directed violence prevention • National child protection system includes interagency/departmental coordination • Provisions requiring multidisciplinary assessment of child protection cases • National legal framework allows for subcontracting and/or outsourcing alternative care services to commercial institutions	**___/8**
Training and Accountability	• Training on prenatal risk assessment of CM • Training on prenatal risk assessment of IPV • Training on identification of victims and referral support by healthcare providers • Training of mental health services for victims • Training for child protection services for victims • Training for medico-legal services for victims • Existence of certification or accreditation procedures for professionals • Provision for child rights impact assessment • Existence of vetting procedures for residential care personnel • Existence of vetting procedures for potential foster families	**___/10**
Data Collection and Surveillance	• Data available on child maltreatment deaths • Data available on child maltreatment hospital admissions • Data available on contact with child protection agencies • Representative surveys on child maltreatment occurrence • Representative surveys on incidences of child maltreatment • Representative surveys on child mental well-being • Annual national estimate of incidence of peer violence possible • Annual national estimate of incidence of child/youth suicide possible	**___/8**

Child Participation	• Existence of national child participation policy
	• Provisions introducing age requirements on the child's right to be heard in placement decisions
	• Direct consultation with children
	• CRC Article 12 is clearly reflected in sector legislation
	  ○ Care
	  ○ Asylum and immigration
	  ○ Health
	  ○ Education
	  ○ Child Employment
		___/8

		SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ___/43

Domain 4: Child-Friendly Victim Justice

Along with the normative framework of the CRC and its supplementary documents, the Council of Europe Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice serves as the foundation for developing the analytical framework for analyzing the extent to which child victims' rights are protected throughout judicial proceedings. The term *child-friendly justice* expands to a number of professionals within different sectors, such as the police and social and mental health workers—all of which have responsibilities for enabling child-sensitive measures throughout the judicial process. Therefore, this domain examines the extent to which child victims are protected within the judicial context, which is comprised of various professionals, in a way that not only protects their rights but also prevents the likelihood of secondary victimization.

In order to construct an index which measures the friendliness of justice systems towards child victims, variables are grouped into seven sets of indicators. The aim is to assess the child-friendliness of justice systems within the EU, particularly in terms of the provisions in place to respond to child victims of violence. Indicators of child-friendly justice provisions include: (1) safety/preventive measures, (2) the right to be heard (3) the right to information and advice, (4) the right to protection and privacy, (5) cooperation, (6) training, and (7) treatment and follow-up Variables are scored dichotomously, where 1 reflects that the provision exists and 0 reflects that it does not exist. Indicators are measured based on the sum of the variables divided by the total variables within the given indicator set. For example, the indicator for safety/preventive measures consists of a total of four variables. If a country has three of the four provision variables in place, the

score for the indicator would be ¾ (or .75). The breakdown of the *Child-Friendly Victim Justice Index* and its associated indicators is provided in the table below.

Table 10.0: Child Friendly Victim Justice

Indicators	Variables	Sum Score
Safety and Preventive Measures	• Existence of statutory provision in legislation on child victims' right to be protected from harm including: intimidation, reprisals, and secondary victimization • Existence of provisions directly or indirectly providing protection caused by police or judicial processes • Existence of provisions directly or indirectly providing protection caused by people other than police/authorities • Statutory provision in legislation requiring special preventive measures when alleged perpetrator is family member/caregiver	**___/4**
The Right to be Heard	• Existence of statutory provision in legislation for child's right to be heard • Existence of interview protocols that enable child victim to avoid contact with alleged perpetrator • Statutory provision requires that children be dealt with in a non-intimidating and child sensitive setting • Legal obligation that child victim gives evidence in favorable setting • Existence of interview rooms/adapted courtrooms for child victims • Existence of screens or separate rooms with audio visual recording and/or other technologies for child victims to avoid contact with alleged perpetrator • Existence of efforts to avoid secondary victimization by limiting number of interviews	**___/7**
The Right to Information and Advice	• Existence of right to information during judicial proceedings exists in legislation • Child victim has the right to receive information • Information is provided at first contact • Statutory provision of the right to legal representation in legislation • Right to Legal Representation -Provision is covered during all stages of judicial proceedings • Right to Legal Representation - Provision covers child victims • Statutory provision of the right to free legal aid exists in legislation • Provision of free legal aid covers child victims • Existence of an automated system to assign free legal aid • Automated system covers child victims	**___/10**
The Right to Protection and Privacy	• Right to protection and privacy exists in legislation • Child victim has the right to privacy • Right to privacy exists during all stages of the proceedings • Existence of state regulation of media in legislation • Child victim is covered by state regulation of media • Existence of provision of self-regulation of media to protect child's privacy and family life	**___/6**
Cooperation/Multi-disciplinary Approach	• Legal obligation to attend multi-disciplinary (MD) training for all professionals • MD training is provided but not mandatory • MD training covers all 4 professional groups • Existence of clear legal obligation to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the child through MD approach • MD approach covers child victims • Existence of a common assessment framework for professionals working with children • Existence of formalized operational cooperation procedures for professionals working with or for children in different governmental departments	**___/7**

Training and Accountability	• Existence of initial training programs for professionals working with children • Initial training programs cover all 4 professional groups • Mandatory training requirements for professionals having direct contact with children on how to communicate with children • Mandatory training covers all 4 professional groups • Existence of continuous training opportunities • Continuous training opportunities covers all 4 professional groups • Mandatory training requirement exists as a pre-requisite for taking up post where contact with children is likely • Mandatory pre-requisite covers all 4 professional groups • Existence of trained police for contacts with children • Existence of trained judges for contacts with children • Training of judges covers child victims • Existence of trained prosecutors for contacts with children	**___/12**
Treatment and Follow-up	• National child protection system requires monitoring and follow-up of all reported cases • National child protection system requires support programs for victims • National child protection system requires intervention/treatment for victims • National child protection system requires intervention/treatment program for perpetrators • Existence of legal obligation to communicate decision/judgment to child victim in a language that is adapted to the child's level of understanding • Existence of legal obligation of child's right to claim compensation for damages • Provision of claim compensation covers child victims	**___/7**

The Methodology of the Study

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The above Child Friendly Index (CFI) that I reviewed serves as a suitable starting point for the selection of indicators for the present study. However, given the inherent weaknesses of existing child rights and protection indicators in grasping the full spectrum of national-level responses, this study seeks to understand the structures, systems, and conditions of member states relevant to a child's rights and protection and investigate critical factors that explain country performance. In other words, my study will advance the methods and processes to explain and dissect national-level responses to protect children from violence and safeguard children's rights once victimization has occurred.

By focusing on indicators of prevention, protection and response, the first goal is to measure how well EU member states perform in combatting violence against children,

as detailed in CRC Article 19 and GC 13, through the construction of a composite index. This study then seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors explain variations in country performance within and across index domains?
2. What factors, external to the CFPI framework, are associated with country performance in child-friendly protection?

Based on the literature and conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapters, the hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Rule of law is associated with better performance in the CFPI.

H2: Stronger implementation of child rights is associated with better performance in the CFPI.

H3: Countries where children are better able to access justice perform better in the CFPI.

H4: Countries where there is greater gender equality will perform better in the CFPI framework.

H5: Wealthier countries will perform better in child friendly protection.

Methodological Procedures

My study consists of two phases. The first phase consists of the development, construction, and validation of the Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI). The second phase examines statistical relationships between a number of hypothesized variables and CFPI components. The OECD Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators (2008) provides a ten-step framework for constructing composite indicators, which is used to

inform the methodological choices for the present CFPI. Existing literature has acknowledged the complexity of constructing and developing proper techniques to measure country performance in various areas of child rights and protection, resulting in a wide range of methodological approaches (OECD, 2009; Mekonen, 2009; Freudenberg, 2003). Given the complicated nature composite indices, methodological issues must be adequately addressed prior to the construction and dissemination of composite indicators in order to avoid misrepresentation of the data (OECD, 2008). The methodological choices and theoretical framework development can have a significant impact on the quality of the overall index (OECD, 2008). "The quality of a composite indicator as well as the soundness of the messages it conveys depend not only on the methodology used in its construction but primarily on the quality of the framework and the data used" (OECD, 2008, p. 17). Subsequently, a composite index grounded in a weak theoretical framework can convey the wrong message. Therefore, it is critical that the developer be transparent in their methodological choices and that the framework selection be clear, concise, and sound, and fit the purpose of the overall index (OECD, 2008).

Phase 1: Construction of the Child Friendly Protection Index

The first step for building a composite index is to construct a sound theoretical framework that provides the foundation for the selection and combination of indicators that form the index. Essentially, the theoretical framework reflects a series of agreed upon concepts used to measure the various aspects of the index. During this stage, it is important for the developer to focus on achieving the following objectives: (1) clearly define the phenomenon that the index will measure, (2) identify the key factors, or indicators, needed to measure the phenomenon, and (3) group and link the selected

indicators into themes, or dimensions. These steps form the basis of the theoretical framework which clearly explains and justifies the structure of how the multi-dimensional phenomenon will be measured. The primary focus of this step is to define and conceptualize the various concepts forming the measurement framework.

The Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) is a child rights-based framework that seeks to measure how well national stakeholders perform in protecting and responding to a spectrum of rights-related issues related to violence against children. In order to measure performance, the CFPI framework is informed by three key approaches commonly identified in existing literature on child rights-related indicators. The CFPI measurement approach is defined below.

A. 3-P's Approach

Following the methodology of Mekonen (2009), the present study will measure government performance in protecting children from violence. The construction of the composite index follows what is known as the "3-P's approach," which encompasses three sets of children's rights. These sets of rights summarize states parties' obligations to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of the child and are separated into clusters of (1) protection, (2) provision, and (3) participation. This approach, which is heavily guided by core provisions of the UNCRC, allows for measurement of the extent to which states are compliant with their obligations stated in UNCRC provisions.

B. Child's Rights-Based Approach

A rights-based approach is often used to guide research in the areas of child welfare, children impacted violence, and more recently criminal justice interventions (Vuckovic Sahovic & Eriamiatoe, 2019; Johansson & Stefanson, 2019; Sandberg, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, a child rights-based approach is used to inform measurement of duty bearers with specific human rights duties towards children impacted by violence. The term *duty bearer* refers to various roles and responsibilities of individuals, institutions, and sectors, across all levels, who are responsible for upholding specific children's rights (Mekonen, 2009). Upon ratification of the CRC, states parties are obligated to protect, promote and respect the various rights detailed throughout the articles, which are further supplemented by General Comments (GC) published by the Committee. In the context of violence against children, duty bearers refer to those responsible for protecting and fulfilling the child's right to protection from violence, as detailed explicitly in Article 19 and GC 13. These protections are further supported by a number of other provisions within and throughout the CRC.

C. Multidimensional Approach

The rights of the child outlined in the CRC include various civic, political, social, economic and cultural rights, all of which are interrelated and universal. Within the context of protecting children from violence, there exists a complex interrelationship between the rights of children and the responsibilities of key stakeholders and duty bearers, which requires a multidimensional approach to measurement (Mekonen, 2009). In addition, it is understood that the protection of children's rights when violated requires response from multiple sectors including social services and the criminal justice system. Composite indicators seek to measure complex multi-faceted phenomenon, such as violence against children. Therefore, the CFPI measures the spectrum of rights-related issues faced by EU member states in ending violent victimization of children in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses

Data Selection

Once a sound theoretical framework has been developed, the next step in developing the CFPI is to select a number of indicators and variables to create a raw dataset. While the choice of indicators is guided by the theoretical framework for the composite, the data selection process can be quite subjective, as there may be no single definitive set of indicators. Furthermore, there are a number of strengths and weaknesses when constructing composite variables, many of which derive from the quality of the underlying variables in terms of their soundness and relevance to the phenomenon being measured (Freudenberg, 2003). The selection of indicators to measure country performance often vary in quality based on the accessibility and geographical coverage of the data. In order to measure, track and monitor country performance within a given policy arena, the nation-state is the most common unit of analysis, which may lead to a number of inherent weaknesses if misrepresented. For example, the challenges faced by smaller countries likely differs from larger countries, particularly in terms of the economy and development. It is therefore important to account for these variations during the development and construction phases of the composite index to provide an accurate representation of the country's performance (Freudenberg, 2003).

A. Data sources

Data collected for this study consists of a number of secondary data sources covering a 5-year timeframe from 2013 to 2018. The sample and geographical coverage consists of all European Union member states, where n=28 and the unit of analysis is the nation state. Although the United Kingdom is no longer a part of the European Union, it will be included in the sample for this research since it was still a member state in 2018.

The data focuses on national level efforts and therefore does not include data at the sub-national or local levels.

This research uses secondary data sources that are publicly available in order to construct the datasets for the composite index and statistical analyses. The dataset incorporates a number of qualitative and quantitative sources including government documents and publications, NGO publications and supplementary annexes, and datasets published by regional and international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the European Union and affiliated institutions, and other research and development publications.

B. Qualitative and quantitative indicators

Data sourced for the construction of the composite index dataset includes both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The majority of qualitative indicators reflected in the dataset are binomial variables that are valued as 1 for existence of a policy or mechanism and 0 if they are not present. In cases where the measures are only partially implemented, the variable is given a score of 0.5. For example, the existence of a law banning child marriage within a country would be scored as 1. Another example would be if a country has signed an international convention has not yet ratified it. Because the convention is not fully implemented, it would be given a score of 0.5. In cases where quantitative variables are used for the index dataset, the variables are converted into rates or percentages to reflect a minimum score of 0 and maximum score of 1.

According to the OECD Handbook, upon completion of the data selection (step 2), the index developer should have accomplished the following:

- Checked the quality of available indicators

- Discussed the strengths and weakness of each selected indicator
- Created a summary table on data characteristics which includes factors such as availability (across country and time), source, type (hard, soft or input, output, process)

(See: OECD, 2008, p. 24)

C. Imputation of missing data.

Another variable selection problem inherent to composite indicators relates to how missing values are managed. Cross-country data can be difficult to obtain, especially when the accessibility of comparable information is limited or non-existent. Fortunately, there are several approaches to address the issue of missing values, which include: Data deletion, mean substitution, regression, multiple imputation, nearest neighbor or simply ignore them. Ideally, the dataset for the composite index will be fully populated for each country, as this is part of the indicator selection criteria. However, in cases where values are missing and there is no accessible source to obtain the information within the 5-year timeframe, the values will be ignored, and the average will be calculated on the remaining indicators. Furthermore, countries with missing data will be acknowledged in the data analysis.

Normalization, Weighting and Aggregation

The construction of a composite index requires the standardization, weighting, and aggregation of indicator values. Similar to the work of Mekonen (2009), indicators sourced for the present index encompass various values and ranges. It is therefore important that indicator values are standardized and equivalently scaled to reflect the differences in ranges of indicators (Mekonen, 2009). Linear Scaling Technique (LST),

also known as the minimum-maximum method, is the selected method of standardization for the construction of the Child Friendly Protection Index. Methods of standardization vary in academic research. Of these methods, LST is the most conventional technique to standardize indicator scores ranging 0 to 1, which is reflected in a number of widely known composite indices such as: the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), Mekonen's Child Friendliness of Governments Index (CFI), the Global Peace Index (GPI), the End of Childhood Index (Save the Children, 2017) and the Kids Rights Index. For this study, indicator values are determined based on minimum and maximum values, which convert variables into a score between 0 and 1.

The next step in constructing a composite index is selecting a weighting scheme, in which the developer can either choose no weighting or equal weighting. Prior research suggests equal weighting to be ideal when causal relationships of indicators is either insufficient or unknown (Mekonen, 2009; Greco et al., 2019; Bandura, 2008; OECD, 2008). Similar to the CFI, the proposed measurement of the CFPI reflects a compilation of multi-dimensional indicators and key concepts reflected in the conceptual and analytical framework cannot be perfectly quantified (Mekonen, 2009). Therefore, this study treats all indicators and dimensions equally and utilizes an equal weighting scheme; the most common approach to weighting in existing literature (Greco et al., 2019; Bandura, 2008; OECD, 2008).

Once indicators have been standardized and a weighting scheme has been selected, the next step is to establish an appropriate method to combine indicator scores into dimension indices. Dimension indices are then combined into one composite index that measures country performance in child-friendly protection. The most common

method of aggregation for cases where the functional relationship of indicators is not well-known is additive aggregation. Additive aggregation is the selected method for the present study due to the unknown relationships between indicators in the Child Friendly Protection Index.

Indicators values are measured based on the sum of the selected variables out of the total possible count of variables. For example, *social programs* are an indicator under the *prevention mechanisms* sub-domain. There are seven variables that make up this indicator. If the existence of a variable, such as parenting programming, is not present within the country but the other six are, the score for the *social programs* indicator would be 6/7. Once this is completed for all indicators, the same method is used to score sub-domains and domains. The sum of the indicator values that make up the given sub-domain or domain is divided by the total possible indicators. The same is done to create a final composite index score measuring the overall performance of child friendly protection within each country. In doing so, countries can be ranked from best to worst performance in the overall composite index as well as within domains and sub-domains.

Reliability Analysis

One of the arguments against composite indictors is that they rely on the assumptions of the developer, which can be highly subjective and consequently influence the overall message that it seeks to convey. In order to address these issues, well-developed indices have incorporated Reliability Analysis methods to assess how output variations in models can be allocated to the different assumptions, or methodological choices, made during the construction of the various index variables, indicators, components and dimensions. Therefore, the next step for the CFPI is to conduct

reliability analyses in order to increase transparency and assess the robustness of the overall index. This procedure measures how the various indicators depend on the information in which it composes. In other words, reliability analysis is a procedure that examines the structural properties of the index dataset. Following the methods similar to that of Bradshaw and Richardson's Child Well-being Index (2009), reliability analysis is applied at for the domain scores of the CFPI. In doing so, the results indicate how consistent the findings are for country performance within each area and determine the extent to which different measures, or assumptions, have a significant impact on the overall strength of the Child Friendly Protection Index.

Phase 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

During the second phase of this study, multiple regression modeling will be used to evaluate and explain the Child Friendly Protection Index scores of each country. Multiple regression analysis is an extension of simple linear regression and used to assess the strength of the relationship between a dependent (outcome) variable and multiple independent (predictor) variables. In this case, the goal is to understand what factors may help explain a country's ranking in the newly developed Child Friendly Protection Index.

Upon completion of the CFPI, a number of independent variables will be used to test the aforementioned research questions and, subsequently, evaluate the newly created index. For the purpose of this study, the dependent variable will be each country's CFPI score. Apart from the CFPI scores, five (5) independent variables were selected for this study and are provided as follows:

A. Rule of law (IV1)

The World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of law index measures how rule of law is perceived and experiences by the general public across 44 indicators across eight categorical dimensions. This independent variable was selected for this study because there is possibly a connection between a country's performance in overall governance and anti-corruption and how well they are protecting children from violence. In order to construct the index, the researchers collected data from over 110,000 household and expert surveys. The index results have been published annually since 2015, with the exception of 2017 to 2018, which is combined. The Rule of Law index measures the following dimensions:

- Constrain on governmental powers
- Absence of corruption
- Open government
- Fundamental rights
- Order and security
- Regulatory enforcement
- Civil justice
- Criminal justice

Each country is scored and ranked for each of the dimensions. Scores are valued 0 to 1, where 1 indicates absolute best performance and 0 absolute worst. The data published for 2017 to 2018 is used to create this set of independent variables. The score (valued 0 to 1) for each EU member state is recorded for each dimension, resulting in a total of eight

total variables measuring rule of law. Note that Lithuania is not included in the Rule of Law index and, therefore, will be excluded for this analysis.

Hypothesis 1: Rule of law is associated with better performance in the CFPI

B. Child rights implementation (IV2)

The next set of independent variables examines how countries perform in implementing children's rights. This independent variable was selected primarily because there is a possibility that in places where children are experiencing better child rights outcomes in general, they are likely better protected from violence. The Kids Rights Index measures child rights implementation across five key domains: (1) life, (2) health, (3) education, (4) protection, and (5) environment. The index provides a ranking and score for each country in each domain and provides an overall score for performance in all domains. The data published for 2018 is collected for each of the EU member states. Following the same procedure as stated above, domain scores for each country are recorded and valued 0 to 1, where 1 reflects best performance in the domain and 0 reflects worst. As a result, the independent variable of *child rights implementation* is measured based on a set of five variables reflected in the index dimensions.

Hypothesis 2: Stronger implementation of child rights is associated with better performance in the CFPI

C. Children's access to justice (IV3)

The data used to measure children's access to justice is collected from the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) Access to Justice Index, published in 2016. This measurement focuses primarily on court remedies when children's rights are violated, but does not solely focus on the child's right to protection from violence. Therefore, it was

selected to better understand if there is a relationship between general access to remedies and actual structures and procedures to respond to VAC. This global index measures the extent to which countries enable children to access justice based on three sets of indicators: (1) legal status of the CRC, (2) legal status of children, and (3) remedies. Countries are scored as percentages for each set of indicators. In order to maintain consistency within the dataset, percentages for country performance in each of the three dimensions are converted to decimals, ranging from 0 to 1.

Hypothesis 3: Countries where children are better able to access justice perform better in the CFPI

D. *Gender equality (IV4)*

The Gender Equality Index, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), consists of six core domains: *work, money, knowledge, time, power* and *health.* Historically in many countries, women's rights are often recognized first, followed by children rights. Therefore, this independent variable was selected to examine if gender equality impacts the provisions in place to protection children from VAC. EIGE also created two additional domains, violence against women and intersecting inequalities, to measure progress in gender equality among the EU28 for years 2005, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019. The six core domains and two additional domains are measures used as the independent variable of *gender inequality.* Data is collected for all 28 countries of the European Union in the 2019 index dataset. The EIGE dataset scores each domain as a total out of 100. Therefore, in order to remain consistent, each domain score will be recorded as decimals (x/100).

Hypothesis 4: Countries where there is greater gender equality will perform better in the CFPI framework

E. Poverty (IV5)

Prior research suggests poverty to be associated with various aspects of children's rights, protection, and welfare. Therefore, the next independent variable used for analysis will be poverty. Data for this variable will be collected from World Bank's official website for the year of 2017 and recorded as each country's GDP per capita in U.S. dollars. Again, this data will be recorded for all EU 28 members as of 2017. In doing so, the relationship between poverty and CFPI performance can be better understood.

Hypothesis 5: Wealthier countries will perform better in child friendly protection

Table 11.0: Independent Variables

Variable	Measures/Indicators	Data Source	Coverage
Rule of Law	• Constrain on governmental powers • Absence of corruption • Open government • Fundamental rights • Order and security • Regulatory enforcement • Civil justice • Criminal justice	World Justice Project: Rule of Law Index	Data for 2017-2018 Lithuania not included
Child Rights Implementation	• Life • Health • Education • Protection • Enabling Environment	Kids Rights Index	Data for 2018
Child Access to Justice	• Legal Status of CRC • Legal Status of Children • Remedies	CRIN Access to Justice Index	Data for 2017
Gender Equality	• Work • Money • Knowledge • Time • Power • Health • Violence against Women • Intersecting Inequalities	EIGE Gender Equality Index	Data for 2017
Poverty (national wealth)	• GDP Per capita		Data for 2017

CHAPTER 5: Findings

Upon completion of the data collection, the initial dataset consisted of a handful of cases with missing values and/or variables with limited or no variability. In cases where a variable had no variability across countries, or had only 1 country of difference, the variable was removed from the final dataset used for analysis. In addition, if a given variable had more than three missing values, it was also removed. In cases with three or less missing values, the mean score of the given domain was applied for the final dataset. See below the final CFPI composition and associated indicators.

Table 12A: Final Protection Indicators; Domain 1

Domain	Indicator	Description	Variables	Sum Score
PROTECTION	International Commitment	***Ratification/signatory status of international and regional instruments relating to children***	• Optional Protocol: Sale of Children • Optional Protocol: Communication Procedures • COE European Social Charter (revised) • Budapest Convention (cyber crime) • Convention on Compensation to Victims of Violent Crime • Istanbul Convention (combatting domestic violence)	**__/7**
	National Law	***Existence of national laws related to violence against children***	• Law against corporal punishment in all settings (n = 6 settings) • Minimum age for admission into employment (full time) • Minimum age for consent for sexual activity with an adult • Law against weapons on school premises • Law against youth gang activity	**__/5**
	National Policy	***Existence of national policies related to violence against children***	• Existence of a main legal instrument on child protection at the national level • Existence of a specific national policy framework (action plan or strategy) for child protection and/or child rights • Policy for child maltreatment prevention • Policy for child maltreatment protection	**___/10**

			• Measurable targets • Funds to implement • Recognizes CM co-exists with other adverse childhood experiences • Recognizes the CM is a risk for developing health-risk behaviors • Policy/strategy for peer violence prevention • Policy/strategy for suicide/self-directed injury prevention	
				SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ____/22

Table 12B: Final Prevention Indicators; Domain 2

Domain	Indicator	Description	Variables	Sum Score
PREVENTION	Social Policy	***Existence of social policies directly or indirectly addressing issues of violence against children***	• National alcohol/drug policies related to children • Social policy includes support to children of parents with substance abuse problems • Incentives for high-risk youth to complete schooling • Housing policies to de-concentrate poverty	**__/4**
	Social Programs	***Existence of social policies for addressing risk factors related to violence against children***	• Home visitation program focusing on families at risk for violence • Public health home visits for new parents includes child maltreatment prevention • Prenatal risk assessment of child maltreatment • Prenatal risk assessment of intimate partner violence • Coordinated early childhood development program • Dedicated mental health services for children	**__/6**
	Awareness	***Existence of awareness-raising mechanisms to prevent violence against children***	• National campaign on child maltreatment prevention • National campaign on peer violence prevention • Sustained national campaign on mental health targeting children • Sustained national campaign on depression and suicide prevention targeting older adolescents • Social and cultural norms change programs for intimate partner violence • Social and cultural norms change programs for sexual violence	**___/6**

	SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ____/16

Table 12C: Final Response & Intervention Indicators; Domain 3

Domain	Indicator	Description	Variables	Sum Score
RESPONSE & INTERVENTION	Identification & Referral	***Existence of mechanisms to identify and respond to violence against children***	• Mandatory reporting of certain professionals • Mandatory reporting of civilians • Existence of child helpline • National protection system includes high-risk populations • Provisions on the right of the child placed in alternative care to issue complaints • Specific legal provisions requiring establishment of complaint mechanisms within alternative care	**__/5**
	Coordination	***Existence of interagency coordination mechanisms***	• Existence of national ombudsperson for children • Government department responsible for national coordination of violence prevention • Specific government lead for peer violence prevention • Specific government lead for suicide/self-directed violence prevention • Provisions requiring multidisciplinary assessment of child protection cases • National legal framework allows for subcontracting and/or outsourcing alternative care services to commercial institutions	**__/6**
	Data & Surveillance	***Existence of data collection and surveillance mechanisms related to violence against children***	• Data available on child maltreatment deaths • Data available on child maltreatment hospital admissions • Data available on contact with child protection agencies • Representative surveys on child maltreatment occurrence • Representative surveys on incidences of child maltreatment • Representative surveys on child mental well-being • Annual national estimate of incidence of peer violence possible • Annual national estimate of incidence of child/youth suicide possible	**___/8**
				SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ____/19

Table 12D: Final Child-Friendly Victim Justice Indicators; Domain 4

Domain	Indicator	Variables	Sum Score
CHILD-FRIENDLY VICTIM JUSTICE	Right to be Heard	• Existence of statutory provision in legislation for child's right to be heard • Legal obligation that child victim gives evidence in favorable setting • Existence of screens or separate rooms with audio visual recording and/or other technologies for child victims to avoid contact with alleged perpetrator • Existence of efforts to avoid secondary victimization by limiting number of interviews • Provisions recognize evolving capacity of children • Legal obligation to ensure that all matters involving children are determined without delay • Legal obligation to ensure that all matters involving children are determined without delay applies to victims • Existence of maximum timeframe for a matter to get to trial	**__/8**
	Right to Information and Advice	• Existence of right to information during judicial proceedings exists in legislation • Information provided must be available in a child-friendly format • Information is provided at first contact • Statutory provision of the right to legal representation in legislation • Right to Legal Representation -Provision is covered during all stages of judicial proceedings • Statutory provision of the right to free legal aid exists in legislation	**__/6**
	Right to Privacy	• Right to protection and privacy exists in legislation • Right to privacy exists during all stages of the proceedings • Existence of state regulation of media in legislation • Child victim is covered by state regulation of media • Existence of provision of self-regulation of media to protect child's privacy and family life	**___/5**
	Multi-disciplinary Approach	• Multidisciplinary approach is recognized as important • Victims are covered in multidisciplinary approach • Existence of formalized procedures to coordinate the work of different departments • Existence of specialized institutions for children • Existence of specialized institutions for child victims	**___/5**
	Training & Accountability	• Mandatory training requirements for professionals having direct contact with children on how to communicate with children • Existence of continuous training opportunities • for contacts with children • Existence of trained judges for contacts with children • Existence of trained prosecutors for contacts with children	**___/5**
	Treatment & Follow-up	• Existence of legal obligation of child's right to claim compensation for damages • Provision of claim compensation covers child victims • Child victims have the legal right to appeal	**___/3**
			SUB-TOTAL SCORE: ____/32

Child-Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) Country Scores

First, the CFPI scores for each country were created by summing all the variables within the given domains and dividing it by the total number of indicators within that domain. In cases where countries all scored the same (either 1 or 0) within a certain variable, the variable was deleted. In addition, missing values were addressed by inputting the mean score for the given domain in place of the missing value. The first domain, *protection*, comprised of three indicator groups: international commitment, national law, and national policy. A breakdown of each indicator and their associated variables is identified below:

- Commitment (7 variables)
- National Law (5 variables)
- National Policy (10 variables)

The highest possible total score for the protection domain, calculated by summing the scores from the three indicator groups, was 22 (Commitment + National Law + National Policy = Protection). The sum score for each country was then divided by 22, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 1. Out the sample EU countries (n=28), Spain scored the highest (.909), with Portugal (.818) and Austria (.821) closely tied for second. In contrast, Denmark (.318) and Hungary (.34) scored the lowest, indicating they had the weakest protection of children in terms of their commitment to international standards, national law and national policy.

Table 13A: Country Scores for Protection

Country	Indicator 1: ***Commitment***	Indicator 2: ***National Law***	Indicator 3: ***National Policy***	Domain Sub-Total	**Domain 1: Protection Total**
Austria	6	3	9	18	.81
Belgium	6	4	5.5	15.5	.70
Bulgaria	3	3	5	11	.50
Croatia	6	3	8	17	.77
Cyprus	6	4	4	15	.68
Czech Republic	7	1	8.5	14.5	.65
Denmark	5	1	1	7	.31
Estonia	5	2	7.5	15.5	.70
Finland	6	3	7.5	17.5	.79
France	7	1	8	16	.72
Germany	7	3	4.5	14.5	.65
Greece	7	1	5.87	11.9	.54
Hungary	5	2	2.5	7.5	.34
Ireland	3	2	2	10	.45
Italy	6	3	6.5	15.5	.70
Latvia	6	4	5.5	13.5	.61
Lithuania	4	4	8.5	15.5	.70
Luxembourg	3	3	1.5	9.5	.43
Malta	5	3	3.5	12.5	.56
Netherlands	6	3	7.5	15.5	.70
Poland	5	3	6	13	.59
Portugal	4	3	8	18	.81
Romania	7	4	5	14	.63
Slovakia	5	2	5.5	12.5	.56
Slovenia	5	2	6.5	14.5	.65
Spain	6	5	8	20	.90
Sweden	7	3	8.5	16.5	.75
United Kingdom	5	4	5	12	.54

The second domain, prevention, consisted of three indicator groups: social policy, social programs and awareness. A breakdown of the variables used to construct these indicators is shown below:

- Social Policy (4 variables)
- Social Programs (6 variables)

- Awareness (6 variables)

The highest possible sum score for the prevention domain was 16. The United Kingdom scored the highest in this domain (.938), with Sweden closely behind with a score of .906. Greece performed the worst in this domain, with a score of .156. The second lowest was Bulgaria, with a score of .313.

Table 13B: Country Scores for Prevention

Country	Indicator 1: ***Social Policy***	Indicator 2: ***Social Programs***	Indicator 3: ***Awareness***	Domain 2 Sub-Total	**Domain 2: Prevention Total**
Austria	4	3.5	4.5	12	.750
Belgium	2.5	3	4	9.5	.594
Bulgaria	1	1	3	5	.313
Croatia	1.5	4	4	9.5	.594
Cyprus	3	3	5	11	.688
Czech Republic	3	5	6	14	.875
Denmark	2	5.5	3	10.5	.656
Estonia	2.5	2	1	5.5	.344
Finland	3	5	2.5	10.5	.656
France	2.5	3	1.5	7	.438
Germany	4	5.5	3	12.5	.781
Greece	0	1.5	1	2.5	.156
Hungary	1.5	5.5	3	12.5	.531
Ireland	2	2.5	3	7.5	.469
Italy	2.5	4.5	1.5	8.5	.531
Latvia	1	2	3	6	.375
Lithuania	1.5	5.5	3.5	10.5	.656
Luxembourg	2	5	1.5	8.5	.531
Malta	1.5	3.5	2.5	7.5	.469
Netherlands	4	4	3	11	.688
Poland	2.5	4.5	5	12	.750
Portugal	3.5	4.5	3.5	11.5	.719
Romania	3	2.5	5	10.5	.656
Slovakia	4	2	5	11	.688
Slovenia	2.5	3	3.5	9	.563
Spain	2	5	3	10	.625
Sweden	3.5	5	6	14	.906
United Kingdom	4	6	5	15	.938

The third domain, response and intervention, consisted of three total indicators, resulting in the highest possible sum score of 19. Lithuania had the highest score within the response and intervention domain (.895). Sweden, Denmark and Croatia were closely

behind with a score of .842. In contrast, Cyprus scored the lowest within this domain (.395). Below are the variables comprising each indicator group.

- Identification/Referral (5 variables)
- Coordination (6 variables)
- Data & Surveillance (8 variables)

Table 13C: Country Score for Response & Intervention

Country	Indicator 1: ***Identification & Referral***	Indicator 2: ***Coordination***	Indicator 3: ***Data & Surveillance***	Domain 3 Sub-Total
Austria	1.5	4	6.5	12.0
Belgium	3.5	5	5	13.5
Bulgaria	5	4.5	3.5	13.0
Croatia	3	6	7	16.0
Cyprus	1.5	5	1	7.5
Czech Republic	4.5	5	3	12.5
Denmark	4	6	6	16.0
Estonia	2	2	5	9.0
Finland	2.5	5	6.5	14.0
France	2	3	3.5	8.5
Germany	3	5	5.5	13.5
Greece	1.5	2	5.5	9.0
Hungary	3.5	6	5.5	15.0
Ireland	3.5	6	1	10.5
Italy	2.5	3	6	11.5
Latvia	2.5	5	7	14.5
Lithuania	3	6	8	17.0
Luxembourg	2	3	5	10.0
Malta	1	5	5	11.0
Netherlands	3	4	4	11.0
Poland	2	5	4.5	11.5
Portugal	3.5	3	7	13.5
Romania	4	2	5.5	11.5
Slovakia	2.5	2	5	9.5
Slovenia	3	4	5	12.0
Spain	2	5.5	7	14.5
Sweden	4	6	6	16.0

United Kingdom	4	3	7	14.0

The final domain, Child-Friendly Victim Justice, consisted of 6 total indicator groups, with the highest possible score of 32. Belgium scored the highest within the child-friendly victim justice domain (.844). Cyprus also scored the lowest within this domain (.391). See below.

- Right to be Heard (8 variables)
- Right to Information (6 variables)
- Right to Privacy (5 variables)
- Multidisciplinary Approach (5 variables)
- Training & Accountability (5 variables)
- Treatment & Follow-up (3 variables)

Table 13D: Country Scores for Child-Friendly Victim Justice

Country	Indicator 1: ***Right to be Heard***	Indicator 2: ***Right to Info***	Indicator 3: ***Right to Privacy***	Indicator 4: ***Multi-disciplinary Approach***	Indicator 5: ***Training & Accountability***	Indicator 6: ***Treatment & Follow-up***	Domain 4 Sub-Total	**Domain 4: Child-Friendly Victim Justice Total**
Austria	5.09259259	4.5	4	2	2.5	2	20.1	.628
Belgium	5	6	3	5	5	3	27.0	.844
Bulgaria	5	3.5	5	2	2.5	3	21.0	.656
Croatia	8	2	5	4	3	2	24.0	.750
Cyprus	4.5	1	4	1	0.5	1.5	12.5	.391
Czech Republic	6	4	4	4	5	2	25.0	.781
Denmark	4	3.5	4	4	0.5	2	18.0	.563
Estonia	6	5.5	4	3.06	5	2	25.6	.800
Finland	6.5	5	2	3	0.5	1.5	18.5	.578
France	5	4.5	4	5	5	2	25.5	.797
Germany	4.5	5	4	3	2	1.5	20.0	.625
Greece	3	5.5	4	3	3	3	21.5	.672
Hungary	6.5	5	4	2	2.5	3	23.0	.719
Ireland	5	2	3	3	2	2	17.0	.531
Italy	3	3.5	4.5	3	5	1.5	20.5	.641

Latvia	5	3.5	4	1	4	3	20.5	.641
Lithuania	5	4.5	3	3.06	1.5	2	19.1	.597
Luxembourg	3	5	4	4	3	2	21.0	.656
Malta	3	2	4.5	2	2.85407407	2	13.5	.500
Netherlands	7	4	4	3.5	4	2	24.5	.766
Poland	5	4.5	4	3.5	0.5	2	19.5	.609
Portugal	4	5	4	4	4.5	2	23.5	.734
Romania	4.5	5	4	2	0.5	2	18.0	.563
Slovakia	5	3.5	1	3.06	2.85407407	2	14.6	.544
Slovenia	5	2.5	5	3.5	3	2	21.0	.656
Spain	7	3.5	4	2	5	2	23.5	.734
Sweden	6	4	1.5	3	0.5	3	18.0	.563
United Kingdom	6	3	3.5	4	3.5	2	22.0	.688

In order to calculate country scores for the CFPI, each of the four domains were summed to create a composite score, where (Protection + Prevention + Response + Justice)/4 = CFPI score. The highest possible sum score for the CFPI is 89. Finding suggest Sweden to have the strongest child-friendly protection, with a score of .765. Furthermore, Greece scored the lowest for overall child-friendly protection, with a score of .460.

Table 13E: CFPI Ranked Country Scores

COUNTRY	CFPI_FINAL	Domain1 Protection	Domain2 Prevention	Domain3 Response	Domain4 Justice
Sweden	0.7653	0.750	0.906	0.842	0.563
Spain	0.7578	0.909	0.625	0.763	0.734
Portugal	0.7455	0.818	0.719	0.711	0.734
Czech Republic	0.7433	0.659	0.875	0.658	0.781
Croatia	0.7390	0.770	0.594	0.842	0.750
United Kingdom	0.7270	0.545	0.938	0.737	0.688
Lithuania	0.7133	0.705	0.656	0.895	0.597
Belgium	0.7123	0.700	0.594	0.711	0.844
Austria	0.7055	0.812	0.750	0.632	0.628
Germany	0.6940	0.659	0.781	0.711	0.625
Finland	0.6915	0.795	0.656	0.737	0.578
Netherlands	0.6845	0.705	0.688	0.579	0.766

Poland	0.6388	0.591	0.750	0.605	0.609
Slovenia	0.6275	0.659	0.563	0.632	0.656
Italy	0.6205	0.705	0.531	0.605	0.641
Romania	0.6150	0.636	0.656	0.605	0.563
France	0.6023	0.727	0.438	0.447	0.797
Latvia	0.5983	0.614	0.375	0.763	0.641
Hungary	0.5948	0.340	0.531	0.789	0.719
Denmark	0.5948	0.318	0.656	0.842	0.563
Estonia	0.5808	0.705	0.344	0.474	0.800
Slovakia	0.5750	0.568	0.688	0.500	0.544
Cyprus (Republic of)	0.5388	0.681	0.688	0.395	0.391
Bulgaria	0.5383	0.500	0.313	0.684	0.656
Luxembourg	0.5363	0.432	0.531	0.526	0.656
Malta	0.5290	0.568	0.469	0.579	0.500
Ireland	0.5020	0.455	0.469	0.553	0.531
Greece	0.4605	0.540	0.156	0.474	0.672

Reliability Analysis

The next step of this research was to conduct a reliability analysis. Reliability analyses are used to examine the reliability of a given measurement scale – in this case, the CFPI. First, all 15 variables of the CFPI were inputted in the analysis, resulting in an Alpha score of .503. In order for a measurement score to have the strongest reliability, the Alpha score should be at least .7. Results from this analysis indicate that the CFPI could potentially have a stronger reliability score by removing certain variables. Therefore, the analysis was run again with the *commitment total* variable removed, resulting in Alpha=.534. This process was repeated five more times, removing the indicated variables to determine whether or not removing certain variables would strengthen the reliability of the CFPI. With 6 removed variables, and 9 variables left, the Alpha score reached .639. In conclusion, it can be determined that the CFPI may not necessarily be the most reliable measurement tool, even with the removal of certain variables. Nevertheless, the next step

of this research was to examine relationships between the CFPI and various external variables through correlation and regression analyses.

OLS Regression

OLS regression was used to examine the relationship between the CFPI and various external variables. First, the CFPI with removed variables (Alpha=.639), as indicated in the reliability analysis, was used in regression but was found to have no significance with any of the given independent variables. The same procedure was conducted with the full CFPI (Alpha=.503), which worked best with regression and reflected more significance. Therefore, the following results are based on regression and correlation analysis of the full CFPI.

Table 14: Regression Model Results

Model	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	VIF
(constant)	.148		3.339	.003	--
Rule of Law	.000	-.390	-2.020	.056	1.125
Child Rights Implementation	.000	-.043	-.232	.819	1.038
Child Access to Justice	.219	.212	1.108	.280	1.100
Gender Equality	.000	.129	.695	.494	1.037
Poverty	.000	-.25	-.131	.897	1.097

**R-Squared = .270; N = 28*

The first independent variable, *Rule of Law,* was close but not significant in the regression model (p=.056) and with Pearson's Correlation analysis (p=-.452). There was a not significant relationship between CFPI performance and *Child Rights* since p >.05 (p = .819), where child rights predict CFPI performance. The remaining variables, *Access to Justice* (p=.280), *Gender Equality* (.494) and *Poverty* (.897), also reflected no significance in the regression model with CFPI as the dependent variable. The

independent variable, *Rule of Law* was the only variable to have significance in correlation and regression analysis.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion & Implications

The purpose of this research was to explore the ways in which EU countries protect and respond to issues of violence against children. The construction of the Child Friendly Protection Index (CFPI) allowed for the examination of country performance across four key domains: protection, prevention, response/intervention and child-friendly justice. By focusing on these key areas, I was able to achieve the first goal of this research, which was to measure how well EU member states perform in combatting violence against children. In this case, Sweden and Spain ranked the highest in CFPI performance, with Portugal closely behind. In contrast, Ireland and Greece had the lowest composite score, suggesting that they have the weakest child friendly protection out of the EU28.

To restate, the first research question sought to understand what factors internal to the CFPI framework might explain country performance. This can be answered by examining final domain scores against the total CFPI score. Based on findings from the CFPI sum scores, the top-ranking countries are Sweden, Spain, Portugal and Czech Republic. When looking at total domain scores, it appears that Spain, Croatia and Portugal had relatively strong scores in areas of protection, response and justice domains in comparison to their country counterparts. Based on these observations, one might infer that countries with stronger protection, response and justice mechanisms have a more comprehensive approach to addressing violence against children (based on the CFPI). These three countries, however, did not have the highest scores in prevention. In contrast, Sweden and the UK performed best in the prevention domain but not necessarily the best in the justice domain. Future research should explore these relationships further in terms of understanding how these four domains impact each other within the country context.

The fact that Sweden ranked the highest in child-friendly protection does not come to much of a surprise when examining the country's context and role in child protection/child rights efforts. Sweden not only has a history of very strong child-protection policies and laws (corporal punishment is banned in all settings, and has been banned for decades), but they also have been implementing best practice models for responding to violence against children (i.e. Barnahus) since 2006. Interestingly enough, although Sweden scores relatively high in the first three domains of the CFPI (*Protection*, *Prevention* and *Response*), they do not score very well in the Justice domain (.563). One explanation for this could be that Sweden's child protection efforts are more welfare-focused rather than justice-focused. Sweden's strength in the CFPI is indicated in the prevention domain, with a score of .906, where they rank 2nd to the UK and in the response domain, where they also ranked second. Future research should further examine possible explanations as to why

One of the independent variables, rule of law, was not significant in the regression model but noteworthy for the sake of discussion. For the years 2017-2018, Sweden is cited by the Rule of Law Index as being #4 for strongest rule of law within the European region. In this case, rule of law is measured based on a country's performance across 8 key issue areas: (1) constraints on government powers, (2) absence of corruption, (3) open government, (4) fundamental rights, (5) order and security, (6) regulatory enforcement, (7) civil justice and (8) criminal justice. Therefore, it would be beneficial in the future to examine if rule of law can be significant with different independent variable combinations in a regression model.

Sweden is cited as being top ranked in prior research involving composite indices to compare countries' strengths in areas of child rights and protection, as noted in Chapter 2. This is an indication that their policies and provisions are indeed holistic, multi-disciplinary and child-focused and that the protection of children from violent victimization goes beyond law-on-the-books. In addition, this country tends to have a generally positive reputation at the international level based on its display of good governance, social democracy and human rights.

Greece ranks the lowest in the overall CFPI ranking and scores in the lower segments of the protection, prevention and response domains. The justice domain, again, is somewhat of an outlier in this case because Greece's ranking is not in the bottom five. However, similar to the observations with Sweden within the prevention domain, Greece's score is drastically lower than its country counterparts (.156), in comparison with Sweden's score of .906. The second lowest score in the prevention domain is Bulgaria with a score of .313. This, again, sheds light on the importance of prevention when seeking to achieve child friendly protection within the context of VAC.

According to prior research, Greece has struggled with implementing an adequate child protection system due to economic recession. This has resulted in an increase in unemployment, homelessness, hunger and the overall need for basic health, social and welfare needs, particularly among their younger populations (Kallinikaki, 2015). Existing literature has indicated there to be a correlation between poverty and child abuse and neglect, which sheds light on the need for more concerted efforts to address the deeper rooted economic and social issues in order to address the basic protection needs of children. In addition, the economic crisis in the country has resulted in a decline of

funding for prevention and response programs (Kallinikaki, 2015). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Greece did not perform well in the CFPI as a whole, or within any of the indicator domains.

Missing data and lack of data for certain variables became an issue during the data analysis phase of this research. This limitation was addressed by eliminating cases that lacked variability and/or that had too many missing values. The issue of missing values in dataset construction and how to address such issues varies across research but, for this case, dropping cases and using mean scores where applicable was deemed the best decision. In addition, this data was self-collected, and the dataset was constructed based on secondary data collected by various other organizations and entities. Limitations exist when the researcher compiles their own data, simply due to the issue of human error. Although these issues were controlled to the best of my ability, there is always a possibility that something was entered incorrectly.

Findings from this research also identified some weaknesses regarding the reliability of the CFPI framework. The reliability analysis revealed, even with removal of various indicators, that the CFPI was not significant in terms of reliability. It would therefore be important to focus future efforts on refining this tool so that the reliability score can be stronger, resulting in a more solid tool to measure country performance. Although findings from this research are limited, they still serve as a starting point for creating a more comprehensive tool for understanding country performance under the child-friendly justice movement. Future research can build on this framework as a basis for creating a more reliable tool for analysis. Furthermore, through the exploration of country

performance in child rights and protection, better policies and practices may be developed and tailored to address the specific needs of each individual country.

Another important aspect to keep in mind is the overall limitations of composite indices in general. In many cases, composite indices can be quite subjective, as the researcher is creating a new model of measurement that they believe to be accurate. In this case, the CFPI was constructed based on prior literature covering the various aspects of responses to violence against children. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken at face value, simply because it does not, and cannot, include every single aspect of the child's right to protection.

Another limitation of this research, which may have affected the regression model findings, is that there are a limited number of cases (28 countries). This likely impacted the significance in the overall findings. In the future, it would be beneficial to examine whether or not a larger number of cases impacts the significance values in regression, simply because there might be more empirical support for the model. It would also be beneficial to examine the relationship between CFPI scores and other independent variables related to the cultural context of the given countries. Lastly, future research should dig deeper into understanding the reason for a negative coefficient for the *rule of law* independent variable.

Future research should focus on examining these critical domains more in-depth and could provide more insight on country-specific issues related to CFPI performance. In addition, it would be beneficial to examine country performance in these critical areas over time rather than just focusing on data from a single given year. Efforts should made to explore differences between existence of policies versus actual implementation in

practice. For example, a country may have certain provisions in place for interviewing child victims in court, but that does not necessarily mean that those provisions are being implemented. Therefore, it is important to explore variances in policy and practices as it related to addressing issues of violence against children.

Lastly, this rights-based approach could be better understood by exploring the relationship between CFPI performance and child-related outcomes, specifically as it relates to violence, protection and post-court outcomes. The examination of child-related outcomes would provide a better understanding of the impact of promising practices, such as the Barnahus and Children's Advocacy Center models. However, research on child-related outcomes and the overall impact of child-centered models of protection and justice also remains scant, especially in Europe.

Prior research identifies composite indices as useful tools for evaluating country performance. Composite indices have been used to examine country performance across numerous child-related issues, including children's rights in various settings. In addition, the importance of implementing child-friendly approaches to protection continues to be emphasized in research, policy and practice. As this child-friendly movement continues to gain momentum throughout Europe, it is important to understand factors that may impact a country's willingness to implement such changes and also explain why certain countries perform better than others. Therefore, the CFPI was created, following a child-rights approach, to examine the current state of EU countries and rank them in terms of how well violence against children is responded to across 4 critical domains.

Policy Implications

Protective Legislation

At the bare minimum, all of these countries are parties to the CRC, which requires them to have effective legislation in place to protect children from violent victimization. However, simply the existence of legislation on the books does not mean said laws are being implemented or, further, implemented effectively. Nevertheless, national laws to protect children from violence must align with international standards as a starting point. It is also important for such laws to address the deeper rooted social and political dynamics within the given country and be responsive to the basic needs and rights of the child.

This research focused primarily on the EU region as a whole. It is likely that there are some differences in CFPI performance that could be better explained based on regional characteristics. For example, country performance in the Nordic region may differ from countries in the Eastern region of Europe. Countries that are newer members of the EU rank differently that those that have been member states for a longer period of time. It would also be beneficial to examine these differences at the domain level to better understand if different groups of countries have similarities in what is being prioritized in child protection.

In addition, this index did not include outcome indicators, which would measure the state of child protection within the given country. Outcome indicator data, especially as it relates to violence against children, can be quite difficult to collect for various reasons. In many cases of violence against children, especially when it involves violence within the family, cases are underreported. It is therefore difficult to measure the actual

amount of violence that may be occurring within a given context. In cases where violence is reported, there needs to be adequate systems in place to collect the data as well. In many countries, the existence of instruments to measure VAC occurrences is quite limited, as shown within the CFPI prevention domain. The purpose of the CFPI was to focus on structural and process indicators, as opposed to outcome indicators. The absence of outcome indicators, however, remains a limitation within this study.

Prevention and Awareness Raising

Another important aspect of rights-based child protection has to do with prevention efforts. In addition to existence and implementation of protective legislation, countries should also be involved in raising awareness of the magnitude, risks and outcomes of violence against children. Due to the sensitive nature of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, it is important to shed light on the seriousness and extent of these crimes. The simple existence of laws is not enough without the existence of prevention and awareness raising policies and programming. One of the best approaches to combatting VAC is preventing its occurrence in the first place, which should always remain a key focus in child protection.

It is also important to keep in mind that in any case where composite scores are measuring a country's performance in a given area, historical context matters. A country's history in terms of governance, human rights, economic growth, cultural norms and so on will likely impact their ability to have proper systems in place to protect children. Furthermore, these historical factors may also explain how or why such systems may not be a good fit for the specific context. Therefore, another limitation of this

composite index is that it does not account for the historical or cultural context of the country.

Knowledge and perceptions of issues related to child abuse continue to contribute to the problem. A study published by the Nobody's Children Foundation (2013) examined just this. In a comparative report from 2010 to 2013, perceptions of child abuse were assessed in six Eastern European countries including: Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, and Ukraine. In terms of child sexual abuse, specifically, most respondents believed it to be occurring more often in 2013 than in 2010. This study also demonstrated most countries to have a significant lack of trust in institutional responses for child victims (Wojcik & Wlodarczyk, 2013). While child abuse is perceived to be occurring more frequently, there is a general lack of trust that the criminal justice system will respond adequately.

These dynamics may contribute to the high rate of under reporting, which further enables perpetrators to continue abusing children without repercussions. As stated prior, the consequences of inadequate intervention subsequently contribute a continuous cycle of child abuse and secondary victimization. It is therefore important to maintain efforts in prevention and awareness to combat these issues. Policies related to awareness raising and continuous training should be made available to professionals working in child welfare, protection and within the justice system as well. Ultimately, there must continue to be efforts concerted in rights-based approaches with trained professionals for responding when prevention falls short.

When existence of laws and prevention efforts are not enough, it is important to have well-trained and holistic support services in place to respond once violence has

occurred. This includes a multi-disciplinary approach, involving not only police, but also prosecutors, judges, mental health and medical professionals, etc. These systems' responses should be focused on maintaining the best interests of the child victim and avoid any form of secondary re-traumatization. While it is important that perpetrators be held accountable for the harm they have caused, it is equally, if not more, important that victims receive the support they need without being re-traumatized by the systems set in place to protect them and help them achieve justice.

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