

FRA Press Release
Vienna, 22 February 2017

Child-friendly justice: the child's perspective

Children involved in court proceedings often feel scared, ignored, and ill-informed, as a new report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows. By asking children across different EU Member States about their experiences and views, this ground-breaking report shows how far we still have to go to make our justice systems child-friendly.

"We are putting children who have already experienced or witnessed distressing things into an unnecessarily stressful situation. Both policymakers and practitioners have to ensure that the anxieties of children involved in court proceedings are taken seriously and kept to a minimum," says FRA Director [Michael O'Flaherty](#). *"This report gives clear guidance on means by which Member States can ensure that children's voices are really heard, and at the same time that they feel safe and protected."*

Some 2.5 million children across the EU are involved each year as victims, witnesses or parties to judicial proceedings. These can be custodial battles in divorce proceedings or cases of sexual abuse or exploitation.

The report '[Child-friendly justice: Perspectives and experiences of children involved in judicial proceedings](#)' is based on interviews with 392 children. It both identifies the barriers children face and possible solutions, as well as a number of promising practices already in use in EU Member States.

Children underlined the importance of their right to be heard with understanding and respect. This points to the need for clear and practical guidelines, as well as training for all professionals who come into contact with children. The children also want to be kept informed throughout the often lengthy proceedings about developments in the case and about their own rights. This demonstrates the necessity of providing age-appropriate information before, during and after trial.

It was clear from the interviews that many situations cause children to feel uncertain and unsafe. Here it is vital to ensure that Member States have procedural safeguards in place that cater to the needs of children, in extreme cases such as those concerning domestic violence or sexual abuse but also in the many custody cases around the EU. These safeguards can include child-friendly hearing locations, video links or pre-recorded evidence, as well as protecting children's personal data from the media and public.

The findings are based on interviews with children in 9 Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK. It complements the Fundamental Rights Agency's earlier report containing [professionals' perspectives](#) on child-friendly justice.

For further information please also see the [press pack](#) and contact:
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Notes to editors:

- On 28 April, the report will be presented at FRA at an event with the Irish Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr Katherine Zappone.
- FRA provides evidence-based advice to EU and national decision makers, thereby contributing to more informed and better targeted debates and policies on fundamental rights.
- More on the Agency's [child rights' work](#) is available online.