



SUPREME COURT
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

**Form to inform the Council of Europe and the European Commission
of the events to be organised
within the framework of the European Day of Civil Justice**

Member State or national or international body:

District Court in Ljubljana
Republic of Slovenia

Activity envisaged:

Children-friendly room for court hearings

Date:

October 2016

Aims:

In the beginning of October, the District court in Ljubljana started using a special courtroom to conduct hearings of children, involved in judicial proceedings.

In several cases children are summoned to courts as a witness or even victim. A less stressful and more friendly place should be available in such situations, when children are often already under stress.

In the recent years the decision has arisen not to conduct interviews or hearings of children in judge's offices. The decision to arrange a child-friendly room at the court was influenced by experiences with existing "safe rooms" at other institutions. Such rooms, however, are often occupied with other activities (e.g. contacts of children with divorced parents) and equipped more playfully, which is not suitable for hearings, because too many toys might disturb children's focus. On the other hand, at courtrooms and offices of judges, there is an air of formality, the equipment is unsuitable for small children, and there is almost always the presence of more people. Phone ringing and noises from corridors are also disturbing for children. In the end, the children, involved in court proceedings, have the right to feel that they are at the court as an impartial institution.

The child-friendly room at the District court in Ljubljana was arranged according to the ombudsman's recommendations and good practices in other countries. It offers a non intrusive environment, accessible to children as well

as judges and court staff. Predictable disturbing factors in courtrooms are avoided and main hearings are not postponed due to schedule conflict with other activities at other “safe rooms”.

The first hearings of children in the new room were performed in the investigation proceedings. The room is also available to the family department judges for interviews with children in divorce and custody cases, as well as to experts - psychologists. The conduct of hearings of children in a child friendly room should be an example and good practice to be implemented to other courts as well.

In order to help youngest children to cope with the role of a witness, in 2010 the Supreme Court published illustrated booklets for children between 5 and 13 years, witnesses in criminal cases. The booklets contain illustrated and written simplified explanations of the court, people present at a hearing and the role of an eyewitness and the accused. In the booklet, a child learns about the work and tasks of a judge and typist, prosecutor, lawyer, accused/defendant and court expert. The underlying message to the child is that his task at the court is important.

The booklet is available online at <http://www.sodisce.si/znanje/publikacije/> .

Publicity envisaged:

Press release, publication on the portal of the Slovenian judiciary –
<http://www.sodisce.si/okrojlj/objave/2016100515571901/> .