

Question 17.a.

Typically, the use of procedural protective measures is in practice facilitated by the support services for victims. Support Services for Victims are operating at two largest courts in Slovenia – Ljubljana District Court and Maribor District Court.

The goal of the Support Services is to help victims, but also judges and court staff in communicating with victims and preparing measures for protection of victims. The purpose of the service is to prevent or alleviate secondary victimization, feelings of discomfort, fear and unpleasant emotions faced by the victim. The Support Services explains to the victim the process of hearing in court, provides information and assistance in terms of Article 65a of the Criminal Procedure Act, possibly refers to relevant non-governmental organizations, asks about his feelings regarding the threat, contact with the defendant, explains to him the possibilities of asserting a property legal claim, free legal assistance and provides other information that the injured party needs.

The service will primarily help victims with special protection needs, i.e. victims whose personal or property rights are significantly affected by the crime violated.

A special focus is on victims who have suffered crimes against sexual integrity (such as rape, sexual violence, sexual abuse of a vulnerable person, sexual assault on a person under the age of 15, violation of sexual integrity by abuse of position, display, manufacture, possession and mediation pornographic material, etc.) and crimes against marriage, family and children (e.g. abduction of a minor, domestic violence, neglect of a minor and cruelty, etc.).

The vision of the service is to bring the functioning and procedure of the court as close as possible to the injured parties, thereby establishing trust in their work.

Domestic violence prevention act stipulates that authorities and organizations shall be obliged to carry out all procedures and actions required to protect victims, commensurate with the level of hazard, and to protect their benefits, and in so doing ensure respect for the integrity of the victim. If a child is the victim of violence, then the child's benefits and rights take precedence over the benefits and rights of any other participants of the proceedings. Special protection against violence is provided for minor family members (children). Social work centres shall offer to victims of violence services in accordance with the act regulating social security, where the elimination of direct threat is the goal of their involvement, as well as working to ensure the victim's long-term safety by eliminating the causes or circumstances in which violence is present, by resolving their social and material living needs. Social work centres shall treat with special care cases of violence against children, and in particular cases of suspected child sexual abuse. After the circumstances of a specific case are examined the social work centre shall be bound to provide forms of assistance for the victim pursuant to the act regulating social security, as well as to assess whether it is required to draw up an assistance plan for the victim drawn up with the victim's help. The assistance plan is drawn up if longterm action needs to be taken to establish a safe environment for the victim, or, if there are multiple actions for providing assistance required and in any other case if they asses this is required. If the victim of violence is a child, then actions are envisaged in the assistance plan for providing protection for the child according to the regulations governing family relationships.

In pre-trial proceedings or as a rule, specially trained criminalists are involved in the investigation conducted by the police on the basis of the Criminal Procedure Act. Criminals and individual police officers receive a series of trainings within the police or in other institutions. A criminalist who works with children must have special skills, knowledge and sensitivity to work with minors. It is important that the criminal investigator pays attention to the needs of the children during the investigation and takes into account their age, developmental stage and emotional state. A criminal officer who works with children is expected to: have empathy and compassion for children, to be able to understand their feelings and experiences and provide them with the necessary support; understanding child development, behavior and psychological aspects; the ability to effectively communicate with children, which is adapted to their age and understanding, this is crucial for establishing trust and rapport; knowledge of how to deal with children who have experienced traumatic experiences; must have high ethical standards and integrity when working with children to ensure their safety and well-being; the ability to collaborate interdisciplinary with experts from different fields; good knowledge of legislation protecting children and their rights. A criminal justice worker who works with children must always act in the best interests of the child and their safety.

The process of collecting information carried out by criminal officers according to the Criminal Procedure Act is completely adapted to the needs, age, and understanding of the child. Based on Article 65 of the Criminal Procedure Act, every child can have a confidential person of their choice at their side during the interview (as well as the entire procedure). Future interviews with a child who has been a victim of sexual abuse may take place in cooperation with representatives of social work centers. It is important that the criminal investigator prepares for the interview with the child, which means that he collects enough information about the child on the basis of which he can decide on the place where the interview will take place, the special needs of the child and other peculiarities.

The Act on Police Duties and Powers, in the chapter General principles for the performance of police duties, specifically draws attention to work with children in police procedures.