

Safeguarding Commission Gozo

Annual Report 2022

79838953
safeguarding@churchingozo.com

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Foreword

The year 2022 marked an important milestone for the Diocese of Gozo with the establishment of its own Safeguarding Commission. This new step reflects our ongoing commitment to ensuring that the values of protection, respect, and care are at the heart of our community.

During this first year, the Commission dedicated much time to laying the foundations of its work. Several meetings and discussions were held to design a system that is both effective and sustainable. Policies and procedures were drafted, operational decisions were taken, and a core group of dedicated individuals came together to serve within the Commission. Their expertise and commitment have been vital in shaping a structure that will guide us forward.

This inaugural year also brought with it the Commission's first two cases. These experiences have reinforced the importance of our mission and the necessity of having a clear and responsible safeguarding framework in place.

In parallel, training initiatives were organised by the Safeguarding of Minors to raise further awareness. These sessions reminded us that safeguarding is a shared responsibility, one that calls on each of us to remain attentive and courageous in speaking up—whether about specific cases or about ways we can strengthen our culture of protection to prevent harm in the future.

Looking ahead, the Commission is committed to continuing its work of consolidating its structures, while also fostering a stronger awareness of safeguarding within the wider public. Together, we strive to build a culture where the dignity and safety of every person, especially the most vulnerable, are always upheld.

Ms Loraine Borg
Head of Safeguarding

1. The Gozo Diocese Safeguarding Commission

In view of Pope Francis' *motu proprio Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019), regarding the new procedural norms to combat sexual abuse on minors and vulnerable persons within the church, the Gozo Diocese started working on creating its own Safeguarding Commission in December, 2021. The Gozo Diocese's Safeguarding Commission was formally established through the decree dated 12th July, 2022. This commission operates in line with the Vatican's *Vademecum* (2020) which are guidelines from the Holy See on how to handle complaints of sexual abuse of minors committed by members of the clergy. Additionally, it will deal with cases of abuse on minors and vulnerable persons by members of the clergy, employees or volunteers within the Diocese of Gozo.

The Safeguarding Commission is formed by a person responsible from the call centre, who currently is Marie-Claude Xerri; three persons responsible for the preliminary investigation who currently are Loraine Borg (Head of Safeguarding), Noel Cini Pisani and Francine Farrugia Magrin; who deliberate on the substantiation of the case with Dr Michael Galea and Pauline Grech. The legal consultant of the Commission is Dr Stanley Joe Portelli.

As a supporting team, responsible for assisting the victim currently there are Dr Marlene Cauchi along with a priest or a couple according to the need; and from the Clergy Commission, Rev. Alex Refalo and Rev. John Vella are responsible for the formation of the clergy accused or condemned.

In its initial year, the Safeguarding Commission met 11 times to set up the commission, prepare the procedure and discuss the way forward. As part of the setting up, the commission organized several meetings with different stakeholders in order to introduce itself and discuss the way forward. Meetings held include those with the Child Protection Directorate and the Educational Secretariat for Church Schools.

2. Prevention of Abuse

The Protection of Minors (Registration) Act (POMA) requires all employers to file a court application for any employee or volunteer who comes into contact with minors. This is part of the vetting process required by Law for any organisation working with minors to verify whether there is any relevant information on the Offenders' Register, as regulated by the same Act. In this respect, the Safeguarding Commission started a process of collecting data of church personnel including priests, members of religious orders and lay individuals who work or volunteer with minors and filed the relevant applications to receive their clearance to work with minors.

3. Safeguarding of Minors (Trainings)

The Safeguarding of Minors aims are empowering the community to be a safer place for minors. It provides several courses yearly that give the participants the ability to understand potential risks, recognize signs of possible abuse in children, be aware of inappropriate behaviour in adults, know preventative measures to take and where to go for help with any concerns. This course is accredited.

On the 22nd October, 2022, a 3 day safeguarding specific course was held for all the members of the clergy within the Diocese of Gozo. Additionally, the official launch of the Safeguarding Commission, its members and how it is going to operate were presented to those in attendance. They were also presented with the Code of Conduct. Those present had the opportunity to ask and clarify issues.

The Safeguarding of Minors also offered a number of training sessions to staff, volunteers, seminarians and members of religious orders as part of their ongoing formation. In 2022, safeguarding specific training was delivered to: Church personnel (such as teachers, catechists, priests, religious, seminarians and volunteers), and members of the public (such as parents).

4. Statistics of Complaints

In 2022, the Safeguarding Commission received a case involving an allegation of physical and psychological abuse against a number of members from a religious order. In this case although the victims were heard, the Safeguarding Commission was restricted in its actions given that the case did not fall under the remit of the Diocese and that the case was subject to the statute of limitations. Nonetheless, the case was still reported to the Vice-Squad for their deliberation.

Another case is still ongoing. This involved an allegation of sexual abuse against a lay person. The case was reported to the Vice-Squad and the Subject of Complaint was restricted from his duties while the case remains ongoing.

There were no substantiated complaints involving vulnerable adults.

Refer to Appendix 1 for more details.

5. Way Forward

The Safeguarding Commission plans to conduct further meetings with other stakeholders such as the Superintendents of both the Vice-Squad and the Gozo Police Department.

Additionally, it is currently working on updating the 'Safeguarding Policy and Standards' document.

The Commission will also seek to obtain clearance from POMA for other Church personnel and implement the newly introduced Code of Conduct.

The Safeguarding of Minors will be providing training to individuals coming from all walks of life with the aim of empowering the community to protect minors and vulnerable persons.

Appendix 1: 2022 Safeguarding Data for Minors

Concluded Assessments

Substantiated Complaints

None

Other Complaints

| Perpetrator: | Complaint: | Timeline: | Reported to: |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 3 Members of Religious Orders | 1 complaint done by 2 adults who were minors at the time of the case. | Abuse reported took place over 30 years ago | Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; Vice-Squad |

Ongoing

| Perpetrator: | Complaint: | Timeline: | Reported to: |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Lay Person | 1 complaint done by 1 minor | Current | Vice-Squad |

Preliminary Investigations:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Substantiated | 0 |
| Other complaints | 1 |
| Ongoing | 1 |

No complaints regarding Vulnerable Adults were received during the year 2022.

Appendix 2: Glossary

| <i>Term</i> | <i>Description</i> | |
|--|--|---|
| Church personnel | Refers to clergy (bishops, priests and deacons), consecrated persons, members of apostolic life and lay people (employed or volunteers) appointed to work in pastoral activity or in supporting the Church's mission. | |
| Conclusion of a complaint | <i>Refer to 3rd Party</i> | Complaints which do not relate to safeguarding concerns but still need to be dealt with by other entities, both within and outside of the Church. |
| | <i>Substantiated</i> | Evidence was able to prove that the allegation did happen. |
| | <i>Unfounded</i> | Evidence was able to prove that the allegation was false. |
| | <i>Unsubstantiated</i> | It cannot be proven if the allegation did or did not happen |
| | <i>Poor practice</i> | Where the behaviour of Church personnel may be causing distress to a child or vulnerable adult or any behaviour that conflicts the standards of behaviour expected or which infringes an individual's rights. |
| | <i>Pastoral activity</i> | Any activity that involves the Catholic Church or its mission. |
| Protection of Minors Act (POMA) Court Application | A request from the Voluntary Jurisdiction Section of the Civil Court (First Hall) for information which may be registered in the Register in respect of any applicant, or person who is employed, or holds any position with the same institution, establishment or organisation whether such employment or position is against payment or otherwise. This is regulated by the Protection of Minors (Registration) Act of the Laws of Malta. | |
| Restriction from pastoral ministry | A temporary or permanent decision to suspend personnel from some or all pastoral activity. | |
| Safeguarding-specific training | Training to raise awareness of the responsibility of Church personnel to identify signs of abuse and report concerns. The training also gives tools to personnel to create a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults. | |
| Types of abuse | <i>Bullying</i> | Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Kids who bully use their power such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity to control or harm others. |
| | <i>Emotional</i> | Minors who are emotionally abused are subjected or exposed to behaviour that may result in psychological trauma including anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. |
| | <i>Exploitation</i> | The act of using a child for profit, labour, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage. |
| | <i>Neglect</i> | Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs. It's dangerous and minors can suffer serious and long-term harm. |
| | <i>Physical</i> | Physical abuse is deliberately or neglectfully hurting a child causing injuries such as bruises, broken bones, burns or cuts. |
| | <i>Sexual</i> | A child is sexually abused when they are forced, persuaded or threatened to take part in sexual activities. There is usually a power difference between victim and perpetrator; as well as a significant disparity between their intellectual capacity or maturity. |