



**SAFEGUARDING
COMMISSION**
GOZO

Annual Report 2024

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FOREWORD

The Safeguarding Commission in Gozo was formally established in 2022. Prior to its establishment, safeguarding matters on the island were addressed by the Response Team, which had been created by the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. This team had been responsible for handling allegations and safeguarding concerns since 1999.

In 2024, the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors introduced a new Safeguarding Policy, offering clearer structures and guidelines to enhance consistency and accountability across all Church entities, reinforcing the Church's collective commitment to safeguarding. This policy serves as a unified framework for all Church entities in Malta and Gozo, ensuring consistent standards of protection and accountability across dioceses and religious communities.

This year marked a period of growth and consolidation for the Commission. Along with adopting the new policy, the Commission's structure was further strengthened through the formalisation of the Advisory Board and the inclusion of additional professionals, each bringing expertise from their respective fields. This expansion enhances the Commission's capacity to respond to safeguarding needs effectively and with multidisciplinary insight. The launch of a new logo, a dedicated web link, and a new central premises, further signifies the Commission's commitment to transparency, accessibility, and service.

The Commission's mission is to promote a culture of safeguarding within the Church in Gozo. This is achieved through preventive measures and support provision for victims and all those involved in the safeguarding process. The Commission manages complaints, conducts preliminary investigations and risk assessments, and ensures that every case is handled with integrity, diligence, and compassion.

During 2024, the Safeguarding Commission addressed 5 general enquires, received 6 new referrals and concluded 5 cases. These figures reflect both the Commission's ongoing work and the community's growing trust in its processes.

The Safeguarding Commission continues to affirm that safeguarding must be recognised as a shared priority among all entities in Gozo that work with minors and vulnerable adults. Prevention, awareness and a shared sense of responsibility, remain the most effective means of protection. Ultimately, safeguarding is not solely a set of procedures, it is a culture of safety, care, and respect that must be embraced by every member of our community.

Ms Loraine Borg
Head of Safeguarding

NEW SAFEGUARDING POLICY

A new Safeguarding Policy was published in 2024 by the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. This new policy underscores the core values of responsibility, accountability, transparency and integrity. It emphasises the principles of mandatory reporting, a victim-centred approach, protection of the complainant, and ensuring the wellbeing of the Subject of Complaint. The policy includes five safeguarding standards to which Church entities must adhere: creating a safer Church, caring for victims, handling complaints effectively, leading with integrity, and ensuring quality of standards.

The Safeguarding Policy introduced three teams within the Safeguarding Office to ensure a holistic approach when dealing with issues regarding Safeguarding. These teams focus on prevention and training, victim care and advocacy, and investigation and assessment. The Safeguarding Policy also introduced new procedures for handling allegations. Should the allegation involve alleged victims who are minors, the case is referred to the statutory authorities. Should the alleged victims be adults, they are empowered by to report the case to the police. Once the investigations by the statutory authorities are finalised, the process is as follows:

- The Head of Safeguarding receives a decree from an Ordinary to conduct a preliminary investigation and/or risk assessment.
- A safeguarding officer is then assigned to assess the allegation and compile a comprehensive report based on the information acquired from the discussions with the complainant, the alleged victim, the Subject of Complaint and witnesses, as well as any available tangible.
- The Head of Safeguarding then refers the report to the Safeguarding Advisory Board – a group of experts in psychiatry, psychology, social work, paediatrics, law, and counselling – for recommendations and conclusions.
- Following a final review by the Head of Safeguarding, the reports of both the Safeguarding Officer and of the Safeguarding Advisory Board are submitted to the relevant Ordinary, who then decides on what action, if any, is to be taken, including whether the case should be referred to the Holy See.

The Safeguarding Policy applies to all Church personnel, including priests, religious, employees and volunteers.

VARIOUS MEETINGS

The Head of Safeguarding Commission held several meetings with the Bishop of Gozo to continue to establish the way forward of the Commission in policy and practice. In preparation for the new policy various meetings took place with the Head of Safeguarding Commission Malta.

Additionally, the Head of Safeguarding held a meeting was held with the Kulleġġ tal-Kappillani to strengthen their relationship with the Commission and to enable discussions about strategies to create and sustain a safe environment while fostering a culture of safeguarding across the Church for all involved. Another meeting was held with the Designated Safeguarding Officers across the church entities, always emphasising the shared responsibility in ensuring that the Church is a place where every individual - especially minors and vulnerable persons - can feel safe, respected, and protected.

THE SAFEGUARDING ADVISORY BOARD

In 2024, the Safeguarding Board was reframed into the Safeguarding Advisory Board which was established as per the new policy. The Safeguarding Advisory Board is composed of members from different professional fields in order to ensure that the required variety of specialised and appropriate skills, expertise and experiences are at hand when advising on the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

Along with some of the previous members of the Board, the newly established Safeguarding Advisory Board saw the addition of two professionals namely Dr Simon Mifsud, a consulting paediatrician, and Dr Chantelle Azzopardi, a consulting psychiatrist. These two professionals added to the variation of professionals involved and expanded the expertise available when discussing and advising on safeguarding cases.

The board members discuss the reports of preliminary investigations and risk assessments presented by the Head of Safeguarding and put forward recommendations and conclusions for submission to the Bishop. In 2024, the Safeguarding Advisory Board met regularly.

The Safeguarding Advisory Board has traditionally been chaired by the Head of Safeguarding; however, to uphold the highest standards of impartiality and accountability, it was determined that this practice should cease. The new Safeguarding Policy therefore states that the Safeguarding Advisory Board should be chaired by a member of the Board. Dr Michael Galea was appointed by His Grace Bishop of Gozo, Anton Teuma to assume the role of Chairperson.

The Safeguarding Advisory Board in 2024 was composed as follows:

Name and Surname:	Profession:	Role:
Dr Michael Galea	Clinical Psychologist	Chairperson
Pauline Grech	Head of School	Deputy Chairperson
Marie-Claude Xerri	Teacher	Board Member
Dr Simon Mifsud	Consulting Paediatrician	Board Member
Dr Chantelle Azzopardi	Consulting Psychiatrist	Board Member
Dr Stanley Joe Portelli	Lawyer	Offers Legal Support to the Safeguarding Advisory Board

THE SAFEGUARDING OFFICE

The Safeguarding Office is managed by the Head of Safeguarding. It comprises three safeguarding sections, tasked with investigations and assessments, victim care and advocacy, and prevention and training. The Commission also insists on ensuring the wellbeing of the subject of complaint.

All safeguarding officers have an educational background in the psychosocial field and are bound by confidentiality to protect the sensitive nature of their service.

Name and Surname:	Profession:	Role:
Francine Farrugia Magrin	Senior Social Worker	Investigation and Assessment
Noel Cini Pisani	Senior Social Worker	Investigation and Assessment (resigned mid-year)
Dr Marlene Cauchi	Counselling Psychologist	Victim Care and Advocacy
Rev Joseph Farrugia	Clinical Psychologist	Prevention and Training
Rev Dr John Vella	Psychotherapist	Therapeutic Support
Rev Alexander Refalo	Priest responsible for the Office of the Clergy	Wellbeing of Subject of Complaint

PREVENTION AND TRAINING

Safeguarding of Minors – Gozo, is the section responsible for the prevention and training of the Safeguarding Commission. During 2024, it organized 2 training courses with a total of 20 participants successfully finishing the training which is recognised by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority, carrying an MQF level 4 with 4 ECTS. One of the courses was organized for Teen Klabb Malta while the other one was held in Gozo.

Apart from the official course in Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, Safeguarding of Minors – Gozo, has been organizing Parenting Skills in sexual education with the aim to equip parents in dealing with such a delicate subject and

with the help of its publication: IS-SESSWALITA`, KELMA BEJN TNEJN, engage in healthy fruitful discussions with their children. In 2024 a group of 12 people attended the training offered.

In October, Safeguarding of Minors – Gozo, held its annual meeting with the Designated Safeguarding Officers assigned to the different church entities within the diocese, all of which managed to accomplish their first task, that of presenting all their members who work and/or are in contact with minors, for the Protection Of Minors Act (POMA) certification. During this meeting, a new assignment concerning parental consent forms was discussed. In the meantime, Safeguarding of Minors – Gozo worked on various consent forms which were then presented for legal consultation. Once cleared and ready to use, they will be disseminated to the DSOs who will present them in their respective communities to be used for activities involving children.

The Safeguarding of Minors – Gozo creates original posts on a regular basis and uploads them on its Facebook page with the intention to create further awareness. Additionally, an interview with the Head of Commission regarding the Safeguarding Commission was held on Newsbook.

NEW LOGO, PREMISES AND WEBLINK

Apart from the launch of the new policy, 2024 saw the launch of several other important milestones for the Safeguarding Commission. These include the logo, premises and weblink.

A logo was designed and launched keeping the colour green in mind since it is associated with protection of minors internationally. Relevant stationary was printed with this logo including letterheads, envelopes and business cards.



A premises was identified to accommodate the Safeguarding Commission's office in a Church-owned property in Victoria. The address of the office is: Safeguarding Commission, Lumen Christi Media Centre, Fortunato Mizzi Street, Victoria. This location is shared with the Ecclesiastical Tribunal and was chosen for its proximity to the Bishop's Curia, Police Headquarters, the Courts of Justice. The office is central making it easily accessible by public transport, to the alleged victims and subjects of complaint. Following refurbishment, the office was launched in 2024.

A weblink was also established as part of the Gozo Diocese website – churchingozo.mt/safeguarding/. This weblink includes all the relevant information regarding the Safeguarding Commission, including the functions of the Commission, the members of the Safeguarding Advisory Board, the Safeguarding Commission's

Organigram, contact details of the Commission and a link for the newly launched Safeguarding Policy.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES ADDRESSED IN 2024

The Safeguarding Commission handled 5 enquiries relating to safeguarding matters in 2024. These related to enquiries on the procedures adopted by the Church that deal with safeguarding concerns, church entities related enquiries, school related enquiries and external entities related enquiries.

General Enquiries in 2024	
Enquiries on the procedures adopted by the Church that deal with safeguarding concerns	1
Church entities related enquiries	1
School related enquiries	1
External entities related enquiries	2
Total General Enquiries	5

REFERRALS RECEIVED IN 2024

In 2024, the Safeguarding Commission received a total of 6 referrals, of which, 2 cases involved a victim under the age of 18 at the time of the alleged abuse, 3 case involving vulnerable adults as victims and 1 case warranted a risk assessment.

1 case out of the 5 received in 2024, referred to allegations that were received by the Safeguarding Commission 10 years or more after the alleged abuse took place. In this case, the alleged victim was a minor when the alleged abuse took place and allegedly involved a lay person as the subject of complaint. This case is still on going, along with another case that was originally referred in 2022 and the Safeguarding Commission is still waiting on Civil Authorities.

The remaining 6 referrals involved 1 minor as an alleged victim and 1 lay person as an alleged subject of complaint, 3 cases of vulnerable adults as the alleged victims where the alleged subjects of complaint were 2 Diocesan Priests (1 of which was involved in 2 cases), and 1 risk assessment relating to 1 layperson.

Referrals Received in 2024			
Minors	2	Lay Persons	2
<i>1 case out of the 2 cases involving minors was a historical case</i>			
Vulnerable Adults	3	Diocesan Priests	2 (1 was involved in 2 cases)
Risk Assessment	1	Laypersons	1
Total Referrals Received	6		

COMPLAINTS CONCLUDED IN 2024

In 2024, the Safeguarding Commission concluded 5 cases concerning 4 subjects of complaint (1 of the 4 individuals was involved in 2 referred cases).

In the case involving a minor as the alleged victim and a layperson as the alleged subject of complaint, the Complainant did not give enough details for the Safeguarding Commission to be able to proceed further with the report and wanted to drop the report not giving any details of the persons involved. He later passed away.

The 2 cases involving vulnerable adults and the same Diocesan Priest was found to be substantiated and recommendations for restrictions were issued. The other case involving 1 vulnerable adult and a Diocesan Priest was concluded to be unsubstantiated. The case requiring a risk assessment regarding a lay person was also found to be unsubstantiated due to lack of evidence.

REFERRALS			
	Minors	Vulnerable Adults	Risk Assessments
Total Cases Concluded	1	3	1
OUTCOMES			
	Minors	Vulnerable Adults	Risk Assessments
Substantiated	0	2	0
Unsubstantiated	0	0	1
Complainant did not give enough details for the Safeguarding Commission to be able to proceed further with the report and wanted to drop the report	1	0	

SUBSTANTIATED CASE IN 2024

Substantiated Cases	2 Vulnerable Adults
Role of Subject of Complaint	Diocesan Priest (the same subject of complaint in both cases)
Allegation	Sexual Abuse
Recommended a Restriction	Yes
Civil Authorities were Involved	No
Reason for No Referral to Civil Authorities	Victims or their representatives declined to file a police report despite an offer by the Safeguarding Commission to accompany them

CONCLUSION OF INVOLVEMENT IN 2024

General Enquiries	5
Substantiated	2
Unsubstantiated	1
Unfounded	1
Complainant did not give enough details for the Safeguarding Commission to be able to proceed further with the report and wanted to drop the report	1
Ongoing cases	2
Total:	12

GLOSSARY

Safeguarding Commission	
<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Head of Safeguarding	The person within the Safeguarding Commission who oversees and coordinates the work of the Commission within the established parameters of the policies.
Safeguarding Advisory Board	A board within the Safeguarding Commission consisting of professionals who meet regularly to discuss and advise the Head of Safeguarding on Church safeguarding policies, prevention and training, victim care and advocacy, preliminary investigations and risk assessments, and the wellbeing of Subjects of Complaint. The board is also responsible to approve or otherwise the conclusions and recommendations of the report which is to be presented to the Ordinary following a preliminary investigation or risk assessment.
Safeguarding Commission	The entity founded by the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors responsible for promoting safe environments in the Church mainly through preventive practices and training, victim care and advocacy, handling of complaints, preliminary investigations and risk assessments, and follow up on the wellbeing of the Subjects of Complaint.

Safeguarding Office	An office within the Safeguarding Commission, consisting of professionals employed by the Church to offer day-to-day service within the Safeguarding Teams responsible for Prevention and Training, Victim Care and Advocacy, and Investigation and Assessment.
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Types of Safeguarding Concerns	
<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Abuse of Power	When Church personnel uses one's position of trust to cover up abuse, avoid or interfere with justice, or to bully, coerce, undermine, intimidate, manipulate, or abuse a minor and/or vulnerable adult who view that Church personnel as someone to be trusted.
Breach of Boundaries	When Church personnel crosses an emotional or physical line that must be maintained in order to ensure order, safety, transparency, and predictability within the Church.
Bullying	When Church personnel repeatedly threatens or undermines a minor and/or vulnerable adult through various forms of verbal or physical behaviour, including but not limited to, spreading rumours, name calling, purposeful exclusion, making threats, and physical or verbal attacks.
Cyberbullying	When Church personnel engages in any form of bullying that occurs through and within the digital realm.
Emotional	When Church personnel emotionally or psychologically mistreats a minor and/or vulnerable adult through deliberate acts of humiliation, scare tactics, threats, ignoring, isolating, or other similar actions.
Exploitation	When Church personnel takes advantage of an imbalance of power to control, coerce, manipulate, deceive, or simply take advantage of a minor and/or vulnerable adult.
Grooming	When Church personnel forms a connection, builds trust, and establishes an emotional bond with a minor and/or vulnerable adult with the intention of manipulating, exploiting, or abusing them, even if that abuse, in whatever form intended, does not actually take place.
Harassment	When Church personnel engages in a course of conduct which can be reasonably be deemed as unwelcoming behaviour, which makes a minor and/or vulnerable adult feel offended, humiliated, degraded, or intimidated.
Neglect	When Church personnel repeatedly fails to meet the physical and emotional needs of a minor and/or a vulnerable adult under one's care and responsibility
Online Abuse	When Church personnel engages in any type of abuse that happens through and within the digital realm, including cyberbullying, emotional abuse, grooming, sexting, sexual conversations, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation. Such abuse can occur anywhere within the digital realm, including but not limited to, social media platforms, text messaging and messaging apps, emails, online chats, online gaming, live-stream sites, etc.
Physical	When Church personnel physically maltreats in any way a minor and/ or vulnerable adult.
Poor Practice	When Church personnel does not meet the expected behaviour set out in this Safeguarding Policy and/or the particular policies of Church entities .
Sexual	When Church personnel leads, persuades, coerces or intimidates a minor and/or a vulnerable adult into engaging in a sexual activity that involves nonphysical, physical non-penetrative and/or physical penetrative contact.
Spiritual	When Church personnel engages in a systematic pattern of coercive, harmful, or controlling behaviour in a spiritual or religious context. This may include but is not limited to manipulation and exploitation, superiority

	or elitism, coercion to conform, control through the use of sacred texts or teachings, isolation as a means of punishment, or the requirement of obedience to or by that Church personnel, suggesting that the Church personnel has some kind of 'divine' authority.
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Conclusion of a Complaint	
<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Investigated internally by the organisation	When a safeguarding concern is investigated by the HR unit of the organisation or through a formal disciplinary procedure.
No Further Action	The case does not require further action or recommendations by the Safeguarding Advisory Board after the case is presented to them.
Not a Safeguarding Concern	When the case presented to the Advisory Board is deemed as not falling within the remit of the Safeguarding Commission.
Partially Substantiated	Evidence was able to prove that one or more of the alleged incidents did take place, but other allegations cannot be established.
Refer to 3 rd Party	Complaints that do not relate to safeguarding concerns but still need to be dealt with by other entities, both within and outside of the Church.
Substantiated	Evidence was able to prove that the allegation did take place.
Unfounded	Evidence was able to establish that the allegation was false.
Unsubstantiated	It cannot be proven if the alleged incident did or did not take place.

Other Definitions	
<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Church Personnel	Any member or members of the clergy (bishops, priests, deacons), of consecrated life or of an equivalent status, of societies of apostolic life, of the faithful who enjoy a dignity or perform an office or function within the Church, including lay people duly appointed or commissioned to work in the areas of administration, pastoral ministry and care, employees and volunteers engaged in all the various activities within Church entities, staff members engaged with a Church entity through another entity, or seminarians and Religious students in formation.
Historical Cases	Cases that involve allegations which took place more than 10 years ago.
Minor	Any person under the age of 18. Equivalent to a minor is any person who has the developmental age of a child or habitually lacks the use of reason.
Pastoral Activity	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 Chapter 518.
Restriction from Pastoral Ministry	A temporary or permanent recommendation to suspend personnel from some or all pastoral activity.
Safeguarding 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.
Subject of Complaint	A person against whom a safeguarding concern has been raised.
Suspension	A permanent recommendation to suspend personnel from all pastoral

	activity.
Vulnerable Adult	Any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise to resist the offence.
Witness	A person who may provide additional inculpatory or exculpatory evidence to a preliminary investigation or risk assessment.