



**TUTELA
MINORUM**

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE
PROTECTION OF MINORS



ANNUAL REPORT

ON CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SAFEGUARDING



**REPORTING YEAR:
2024**



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Message from the President of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

Having served the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors first as a Member and now as President, I have come to understand our mission as both crucial and a perpetual pilgrimage. Within it lies the irreducible call to walk not simply *for* victims and survivors¹ of abuse, but *with* them in the demanding work of institutional conversion.

This second edition of the Annual Report embodies that commitment, serving as both compass and chronicle in the Church's global pilgrimage toward accountability. The implementation process transcends simple procedural compliance — rather it brings about the conversion of hearts.

Our mission requires us to embody the Gospel through concrete action: by prioritizing faith, charity, and justice in each safeguarding initiative; by fostering peace and the common good through transparent Church structures; and by ensuring that the prophetic voice of survivors remains central to our collective conversion.

The Church's enduring response to abuse requires more than structural reforms: it demands active participation of all, at all levels of ecclesial life. Just as Matthew's Gospel charges us to be "the light of the world" (5:14), so too must diocesan bishops and religious superiors jointly illuminate pathways to accountability.

¹ Among those who have experienced sexual harm, some identify as a "victim" and others prefer "survivor". Out of respect, this report uses the term "victim(s)/survivor(s)" throughout. This is also consistent with the protocol established in the Commission's pilot Annual Report (Reporting Year: 2023).

By aligning safeguarding protocols, sharing formation resources, and harmonizing victim/survivor support mechanisms, they transform jurisdictional boundaries into bridges of trust.

This Commission remains convinced that only by all of us collaborating can we properly honor, as we must, victims' and survivors' wounds — while creating the transparent networks needed to prevent future failures.

In his last address to us at our March 2025 Plenary Assembly, Pope Francis said, “In the daily pattern of your work — especially in the most disadvantaged areas — a prophetic truth becomes reality: abuse prevention is not a blanket to be spread over emergencies, but one of the foundations on which to build communities faithful to the Gospel”. By presenting this Report in the early months of Pope Leo XIV's pontificate, we reaffirm our eagerness and service to the Successor of Peter to continue and deepen what has already commenced. Indeed, safeguarding is the requisite *sine qua non* for the Gospel to be heard and credible.

We have experienced this: it is only when canonical procedures become incarnate in local realities — when policies translate into ongoing parish-level vigilance, formation in seminary, and religious houses — can a path of life be written.

With this Annual Report, we recommit to making that path inevitable. For in the final analysis, our metrics and meetings exist for this alone: that every wounded soul might encounter the Church as the face of Christ.

With my earnest and sustained prayers,

Archbishop Thibault Verny
President



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Executive Summary

The Commission presents its second Annual Report on Church Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding. In this Annual Report, the Commission documents its findings and recommendations for the 2024 reporting period.

Conversional Justice pillar-in-focus: A dedicated study on reparations

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis challenged the Church to respond emphatically to the scourge of sexual abuse, consistent with the Church's calling to continuous **conversion away from evil and toward healing for the wounded**. In its pilot Annual Report last year, the Commission detailed the adoption of **Conversional Justice as a pastoral-theological framework** to accompany the Church's essential path of conversion. As explained in the pilot Annual Report, Conversional Justice consists of the following four interconnected pillars:



The Commission committed to a **continuous and rotating study of the various pillars** in each successive edition of the Annual Report. This second Annual Report presents findings on the Commission's detailed study of **reparations** and its **pastoral-theological basis**, understood as the Church's responsibility to accompany victims/survivors in their journey of healing and repair. The study gathered insights from the **local Churches' existing practices of reparations** and the **persistent challenges to making comprehensive reparation**. The Commission's Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Group also facilitated essential insight into this study, with input directly from victims/survivors.

The results from this study identify specific practices that the Church must further embrace as **critical means of reparations — beyond the partial and often insufficient role of financial compensation in a comprehensive approach to reparations** — such as the following:



- » **assurances of welcoming listening centres for victims/survivors** to be heard and believed by Church authorities
- » the provision of **professional psychological support services**
- » **public acknowledgements and apologies**
- » **proactive and transparent communication with victims/survivors** to provide timely updates on their cases
- » the **inclusion of victims/survivors in the development of the Church's safeguarding policies and procedures.**

»»» Learning from victims/survivors: The Commission's continuously expanding listening ministry

The Commission has benefited from more than a decade of learnings from listening directly to victims/survivors of abuse. Consistent with its victim/survivor-centred approach, the Commission established the **Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Group (AR Focus Group)** and piloted its methodology **in one region for the first Annual Report.**

Concurrently, the Commission committed to expanding the AR Focus Group methodology based on its learnings from the pilot implementation. Faithful to this commitment, the Commission expanded its AR Focus Group methodology **to all four regions for the second Annual Report.** The Commission is deeply grateful to the victims/survivors who generously contributed as AR Focus Group participants. Their **perspectives and opinions are summarized in a dedicated section of the Annual Report, right after the discussion of Conversional Justice.** The experiences they shared directly inform the analysis found throughout this Annual Report, especially with regard to the Commission's recommendations to specific Church entities.

The Commission reiterates its **ongoing commitment to further expanding victims'/survivors' contributions** to future editions of the Annual Report, beyond the synodal phase, throughout the various stages of its development.

»»» Main findings and observations: Accompanying the Universal Church's safeguarding ministry

The Annual Report once again offers the Commission an opportunity to summarize its **main findings and observations** on a systematic basis — to be shared with the **Holy Father, victims/survivors, local Churches, and all the People of God.**

This year's main findings and observations include:

- 1 The elements of an **operational *vademecum* on reparations for victims/survivors of abuse in an ecclesial context based on the Commission's dedicated study.** The *vademecum* aggregates findings into six areas that the Church must further address in order to fulfil its fundamental obligations to victims/survivors: (1) **Welcome, listen, and care**, (2) **communications: public and private apologies**, (3) **spiritual and psychotherapeutic support**, (4) **financial support**, (5) **institutional and disciplinary reforms**, and (6) **safeguarding initiatives in the ecclesial community.**
- 2 The importance of a **streamlined protocol for the resignation and/or removal of Church leaders or personnel in cases of abuse or negligence.** Based on its findings from the pilot Annual Report and now further confirmed by its study on reparations, the Commission emphasizes the importance of **publicly communicating the reasons for resignation and/or removal, when the decision is related to cases of abuse or negligence.** Such a protocol, and any related communication, would maintain due regard for principles related to privacy and the presumption of innocence.
- 3 The value of creating an **academic network that includes Catholic university research centres specialising in human rights, abuse prevention, and safeguarding**, to collect relevant data in the countries and regions covered by the Report. Further developing its findings from the pilot Annual Report, the Commission notes that such a network would contribute to **the diversification of sources for the Annual Report methodology.**
- 4 The importance of developing a **systematic and mandatory reporting mechanism on the safeguarding ministry of the local Churches.** Consistent with its unique organisational structure, the Church has long possessed the ability to document and collect relevant information about its various ministries. The Commission notes the Church's ability to **promote greater transparency and accountability by leveraging its strong tradition of periodic reporting to include safeguarding policies and implementation.**
- 5 The key role played by the **Apostolic Nuncios journeying alongside the local Churches.** The Commission notes the importance of its own closeness to the **Holy See's diplomatic corps** around the world, which is uniquely positioned to encourage, support, and **accompany the ministry of safeguarding in the local Churches.**

»»» Sections of the Annual Report

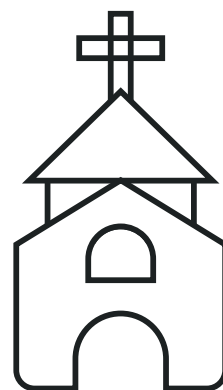
Each section of the Annual Report offers an analysis of a number of Church entities by presenting the following:

1. a detailed **profile**
2. a **safeguarding overview**
3. the Commission's critical observations of the safeguarding **challenges** faced
4. the Commission's ensuing **recommendations.**

Each phase of the Annual Report methodology adopts a **synodal and pragmatic approach with each of the Church entities** mentioned. Consistent with Conversional Justice, the Church entities that are covered in this Annual Report are invited to participate actively. The Commission thanks all those Church entities who engaged, in earnest, with this second Annual Report process. Their engagement demonstrated a meaningful commitment to **our common safeguarding ministry** across the various episcopal conferences, religious institutes, dicasteries, and lay associations.

Section 1: The Local Church in Focus

As a **stable body of the Roman Curia**, the Commission is uniquely positioned to accompany the local Churches' and religious institutes' safeguarding ministry. The Commission exercises its accompaniment mandate on an ongoing basis, through three main channels: (1) the standard **ad limina process**; (2) a **proactive request** from a given episcopal conference or religious institute; or (3) an **extraordinary request** from one of the Commission's Regional Groups.



The purpose of Section 1 is to present an **account of the safeguarding activities and challenges** in the local Churches and within religious institutes, **along with the Commission's subsequent recommendations**. Section 1 serves as a tool for sustained and continued dialogue, pedagogy, sharing of good practices, and mobilizing solidarity around safeguarding with the local Churches and religious institutes.

This year's Annual Report includes two main progressions to the methodology for Section 1. First, for each country that it covers, the Commission presents observations from the **United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's reporting mechanism**, including shadow reports from civil society organizations. The Commission reviews and logs any relevant data regarding safeguarding in the local Church within the particular country. This represents a powerful **external dataset — to cross-reference, contextualize, and verify the data submitted by Church authorities**. Second, during the synodal phase, the Commission systematically invites the episcopal conferences and religious institutes to review and comment on the drafted text that presents their reality. This methodology has been expanded to also invite the **Apostolic Nuncio present in the relevant local Church to provide parallel commentary** during the synodal phase, which provides an additional verification mechanism for the data submitted by local Church leaders.

In this Annual Report, the Commission presents its analysis and recommendations for the following episcopal conferences who came on an *ad limina* visit during the 2024 reporting period:

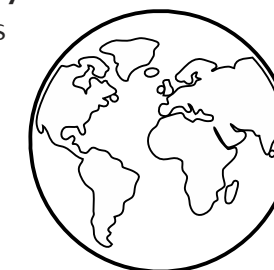
- Italy (including a breakdown by regions)
- Gabon
- Japan
- Equatorial Guinea
- Ethiopia
- Guinea (Conakry)
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Portugal
- Slovakia
- Malta
- Korea
- Mozambique
- Lesotho
- Namibia
- Regional Episcopal Conference of North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, Libya, Tunisia)
- Mali
- Kenya
- Greece

The religious institutes covered in this Annual Report are:

- Brothers of Christian Instruction of St. Gabriel — Monfortains (Male)
- Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (Female)

Section 2: The Church's Safeguarding Mission in the Continental Regions

The Commission's **closeness to the local Churches' safeguarding ministry** is consistently manifested through the Regional Groups. The Commission's members are grouped according to their country of origin into Regional Groups. With its **members and regional personnel living and working around the world**, the Commission continuously **gathers analysis from some of Church's leading local safeguarding experts**.



The purpose of Section 2 is to present that first-hand analysis from the Commission's Regional Groups based on their **expertise and knowledge of regional safeguarding realities**. It is particularly informed by the Commission's **engagement with victims/survivors at the local level**.

This second Annual Report's **study on reparations is especially manifest in Section 2**. Indeed, the Commission presents a wide range of existing practices and challenges related to reparations in the Church across the regions. While parts of the Church in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania demonstrate **important commitments to reparations**, an **overreliance on financial compensation** hinders an integral understanding of repair and healing for victims/survivors.

A significant part of Central and South America, Africa, and Asia are still **lacking adequate dedicated resources to victim/survivor accompaniment**. Finally, inspiring practices of reparations have emerged from various local Churches in the regions, including a **traditional communal healing practice** in Tonga, known as *Hu Louifi*; detailed **annual reporting on victim/accompaniment services** in the United States; **safeguarding guideline review processes** under way in Kenya, Malawi, and Ghana; and a notable **truth-telling report**, *Il coraggio di guardare*, in the Italian Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone.

Section 3: Safeguarding Policies and Procedures of the Roman Curia in Service of the Local Church

In its service to the Petrine ministry, the Commission explores the various safeguarding competencies of the Roman Curia, to **promote an “all-of-government” approach**. The Commission particularly aims to increase understanding and transparency with regard to the Holy See’s policies, procedures, and jurisdiction related to safeguarding.

Section 3 allows the Commission to manifest its **closeness to the safeguarding ministry of specific dicasteries**, based on their respective competencies within the Church’s life.

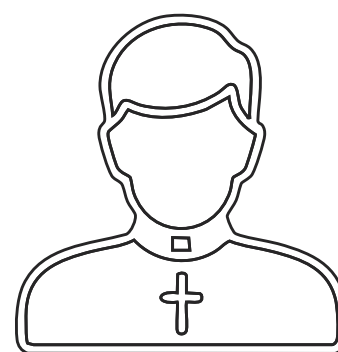
This second Annual Report includes an analysis of the **Dicastery for Evangelization — Section for the First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches**. This Section performs very important functions in **supporting local Churches in the missionary territories**, including supervising their governance and safeguarding initiatives. The local Churches under its purview include **approximately 1,200 ecclesiastical circumscriptions**.

The Commission found a **strong commitment to safeguarding from the Section** and welcomes the **openness with which the Section engaged in the Annual Report process**. The Commission looks forward to collaborating with the Section on implementation of the recommendations contained in this Annual Report.

Section 4: The Church’s Safeguarding Ministry in Society

Each edition of the Annual Report dedicates Section 4 to exploring the myriad of **dimensions of the Church that reach populations in the broader society**. With this section, the Commission highlights the social ministries of the Church — which often champion the rights of children and vulnerable adults — while also emphasizing the importance of **ensuring proper safeguarding standards** in the exercise of those ministries.

In this Annual Report, the Commission begins a **study of lay associations**, which are **formal and recognized groupings of the lay faithful** working together in promotion of some aspect of the apostolate. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christi fideles laici*, Saint John Paul II noted that “a ‘cultural’ effect can be accomplished through work done not so much by an individual alone but



by an individual as ‘a social being’, that is, as a **member of a group, of a community, of an association, or of a movement**. Such work is, then, **the source and stimulus leading to the transformation of the surroundings and society...**” (par. 29, boldface added).

According to the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, these **lay associations are under the competency of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life**. As such, the Commission developed a **pilot methodology to assist the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life** in its accompaniment of the **safeguarding dimensions of these lay associations**.

This Annual Report presents that pilot methodology as well as an initial implementation for one lay association: **Work of Mary — Focolare Movement**.

The Commission welcomes the **important safeguarding reforms recently enacted** by the Focolare Movement. While noting specific recommendations, the Commission also highlights certain particularly good practices, including the establishment of an **Independent Central Commission** for handling cases of abuse within the Focolare Movement; a **Communication Policy** concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults; and **Guidelines on support and financial reparation** in cases of sexual abuse.

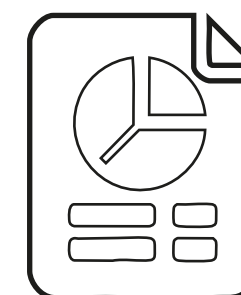
»»» The Memorare Initiative

The Commission has continued expanding its **Memorare Initiative for victims/survivors** as a safeguarding capacity-building initiative in the local Churches of the Global South.

The Commission currently has **20 agreements in place for local Memorare Initiatives around the world**, with another dozen under negotiation.

»»» Financial Report

Each year the Commission presents a brief financial report on its activities and the support received from its donors. The **Commission’s financial report for the 2024 reporting period** can be found in the Appendix of this second Annual Report.



Summary of the Commission's Main Findings and Observations

The Commission's Annual Report seeks to capture the lives and stories of countless individuals and communities. It is grounded in our conviction that if "the truth will set you free," then there is a shared responsibility to uphold the truth, pursue justice, and invest in reparation — acts of a people rising together. These are not external obligations, but the very beating heart of the Gospel, lived out through the Church.

This second Annual Report is not merely an account of the Church's progress and continued areas for improvement. Rather, it seeks to be a living instrument of shared conversion — a means of communicating the wisdom and knowledge learned through the witness of victims/survivors, and the commitment of countless women and men of goodwill who have sought to respond to the question: *what did you do, once you knew?* The Commission hopes that this Report represents another milestone in the Church's ongoing effort to restore trust and promote a shared journey forward.

The Commission once again highlights several main findings and observations based on learnings from its global activities. These activities primarily include consultations regarding the *Universal Guidelines Framework*, building safeguarding capacity through the Memorare Initiative, and worldwide data collection through the Annual Report methodology, especially including the Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Group.

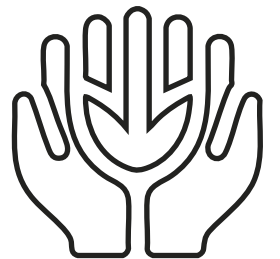
These main findings and observations are aimed at 1) identifying current critical issues, 2) promoting effective policies and practices, and 3) reinforcing the Church's efforts to protect the most vulnerable.

Some of the main findings and observations further develop those presented in the Commission's pilot Annual Report (for reporting period 2023). They are the fruits of the Commission's strategic conversations with key stakeholders, both at the local level and within the Roman Curia. Additional main findings and observations have emerged from insights specifically gained during the current reporting period (2024) thanks to the Commission's continuing dialogue with Church entities, as well as the ongoing experiences and engagements of Commission members and staff in Rome and around the world.

The Commission notes that the main findings and observations identified in this Report are designed to encourage further discernment and informed reflection. To this end, the Commission continues to encourage interdicasterial and multidisciplinary examination of these matters, offering its full cooperation to the relevant bodies.

»»» Reparation for victims/survivors of abuse in the Church – an operational *vademecum*

The Church bears a moral and spiritual obligation to heal the deep wounds inflicted from sexual violence perpetrated, enabled, mishandled, or covered up by anyone holding a position of authority in the Church. The principles of justice and fraternal charity, to which every Christian is called, require not only an acknowledgement of responsibility but also the implementation of concrete measures of reparation.



The Commission's study, conducted across all continents and within various ecclesial contexts, including dioceses, religious orders, lay associations, and dicasteries — and with the contribution of victim/survivor groups — has shown that reparations must be victim/survivor informed and must address the diverse nature of the harms suffered by victims/survivors.

From these areas of study, the following operational *vademecum* has emerged:

Welcome, listen, and care — Creating safe spaces where victims/survivors can share their experiences, including directly with Church authorities if they so desire. The Commission's research particularly reveals the need for victims/survivors to have a place to report their cases without impediment and with essential protections for them and their families against potential retaliation.

Communications: Public and private apologies — Issuing official Church statements that acknowledge the harm caused and that assume responsibility on the part of the Church as a whole. It is important to explore the adoption of a communications protocol with minimum standards for disseminating case information both publicly and privately. The Commission emphasises the imperative that victims/survivors be heard and have their experiences acknowledged through victim-focused and trauma-informed communication practices.

Spiritual and psychotherapeutic support — Guaranteeing access to professional counselling, spiritual accompaniment, and pastoral care, with special attention to victims/survivors over the long term. The Commission highlights the need for systematic support to be delivered through a professional and stable structure, accessible according to victims'/survivors' needs and not dependent only on their own individual initiative.

Financial support — Providing adequate financial assistance to victims/survivors for costs incurred as a result of abuse, including medical and psychological care, as a vital element in the healing process. The Commission notes that financial settlements that do not specifically take these costs into account are generally not an effective means of reparations for victims/survivors, because professional treatment significantly supports their recovery. The Church should assume responsibility for these costs as part of its support for victims/survivors and their families.

Institutional and disciplinary reforms — Strengthening safeguards for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, with meaningful sanctions for perpetrators and enablers of abuse. Victims/survivors should not be left in uncertainty regarding the accountability of abusers and those who enabled or covered up for them. Creating safe environments and ensuring disciplinary actions that are tangible and commensurate with the severity of the crime are essential forms of reparation for victims/survivors.

Safeguarding initiatives in the ecclesial community — Implementing awareness programmes directed at clergy, religious, and lay faithful to foster a process of collective healing. Victims/survivors believe that the entire Church community is called to build a safe Church. Community-based safeguarding initiatives are seen as crucial tools for promoting a culture of protection and care, and a shared path toward healing.

The Commission will further develop the principles of this operational *vademecum* into more detailed procedures to be offered as guidance to episcopal conferences and religious orders, tailored to their different cultural and social contexts.

»»» Removal or resignation due to abuse or negligence and its proper communication

In its pilot Annual Report, the Commission emphasised the importance of developing a streamlined procedure for the removal of “Church leaders who have been subjects of past administrative actions and/or inactions that have been the source of additional harm to victims/survivors of sexual abuse” (p. 13). In line with the lessons learned from the current study on reparations, the Commission underlines the importance of clearly communicating the reasons for resignation or removal, and *issuing a public statement* when these reasons are related to the abuse of minors or vulnerable adults, negligence, or less serious actions that nonetheless may have led to such a decision.

»»» Global observatory on research in safeguarding and promotion of the human rights of minors and vulnerable adults

The Commission recognises the need for the effective assessment of progress made by local Churches and religious orders in the concrete implementation of their safeguarding policies. One of the aims of the Annual Report is to measure and document such implementation on the basis of data gathered through direct interaction between the Commission and local Churches or other ecclesial bodies. For completeness, this data must be supplemented by information from a diversity of sources in order to carry out the information-gathering process thoroughly. The Commission underlines the value of creating a data network that includes Catholic research centres specialising in human rights, abuse prevention, and safeguarding, in order to access relevant data in the countries and regions covered by the Annual Report.

»»» Stable methodology for collecting information on the Church’s safeguarding policies and procedures

The Church is a unique institution due in part to its transnational and cross-cultural presence. By virtue of its organisational structure, it has long possessed the ability to document and collect relevant information about its various ministries. Consistent with the Church’s tradition of reporting on its pastoral activities, the Commission underlines the importance of developing a reporting mechanism on the safeguarding ministry of the local Churches. A consistent institutional reporting tool would provide valuable support in responding to Pope Francis’s request for “a reliable account of what is currently being done and what still needs to change, so that the competent authorities can act”.²

»»» Supporting the role of Apostolic Nuncios and the Holy See’s diplomatic personnel in the ministry of safeguarding in the local Churches

In line with the reflections that emerged from the Synod on Synodality, the Commission recognises the Apostolic Nuncios as key figures journeying alongside the local Churches. Their local presence throughout the world provides a tangible and permanent expression of the Holy Father’s closeness. As Papal Representatives, they are in a privileged position to encourage and accompany the ministry of safeguarding in the local Churches. The Commission expresses its willingness to deepen its collaboration with the Holy See’s diplomatic corps.

² FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (29 April 2022), p. 3, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220429-pontcommissione-tutelaminori.pdf>.

Acknowledgements

The Commission wishes to acknowledge the dedicated work that made this second Annual Report possible. The Commission is immensely indebted to the countless victims/survivors who have contributed to and accompanied the Commission's work since its establishment in 2014. The Commission also thanks the Annual Report Team, as the primary collaborators for this report, including Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Member and Chair of the Annual Report Team; Stefano Mattei, Director of Policy and the Annual Report; and Nathan Leopold, Annual Report Associate.

The Commission also thanks its members and the various personnel who contributed to the analysis presented in this report. From the Commission membership: Archbishop Thibault Verny, President of the Commission; Bishop Luis Manuel Alí Herrera, Secretary of the Commission; Teresa Morris Kettelkamp, Adjunct Secretary of the Commission; and members Fr. Tim Brennan MSC, Ernesto Caffo, Juan Carlos Cruz, Teresa Devlin, Emilie Rivet Duval, Irma Patricia Espinosa Hernandez, Sinalelea Fe'ao, Nelson Giovanelli Rosendo Dos Santos, Sr. Arina Gonsalves RJM, Bishop Peter Karam, Ewa Kusz, Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Sr. Teresa Nyadombo Annah HLMC, Sr. Niluka Perrera, and Neville Owen. From the Commission personnel: Emer McCarthy, Anna Valsi, Augusta Muthigani, Claudia Giampietro, Fr. Daniel Portillo, Daniele Donnini, Deria Licastro, Francesco Pappalardo, Rosanna Giacometto, Ines Franck, Patience Mwangi, Márta Benyusz, and Miriam Coco. The Commission also thanks all of its prior members and personnel, whose contributions paved the way for the Annual Report.

Finally, the Commission wishes to thank all of the Church entities that engaged, in earnest, with this second Annual Report process. Their engagement demonstrated a meaningful commitment to our common safeguarding ministry across the various episcopal conferences, religious congregations, dicasteries, and lay movements.

Introduction

Conversional Justice

Pillar-In-Focus: Reparation

»»» The Gospel pattern of reparation

Pope Francis's May 2023 Address to the Commission called for a "spirituality of reparation":

What is broken must not stay broken...Mending the torn fabric of past experience is a redemptive act, the act of the suffering Servant...This is the path of healing and redemption: the path of Christ's cross...Now is the time to repair the damage to previous generations and to those who continue to suffer...³

"What is broken must not stay broken" is a foundational statement of the Christian gospel. In the Christian understanding, Jesus came to humanity as "the new Adam" on a mission of restoration and repair, because humanity was broken as a consequence of the Fall.⁴ Jesus's death was an act of making "amends",⁵ an act of reparation. In Jesus's atoning death, the sinless Son of God makes reparation to God on behalf of fallen humanity.⁶

³ FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (5 May 2023), p. 2, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/may/documents/20230505-pontcom-tutelaminori.pdf>.

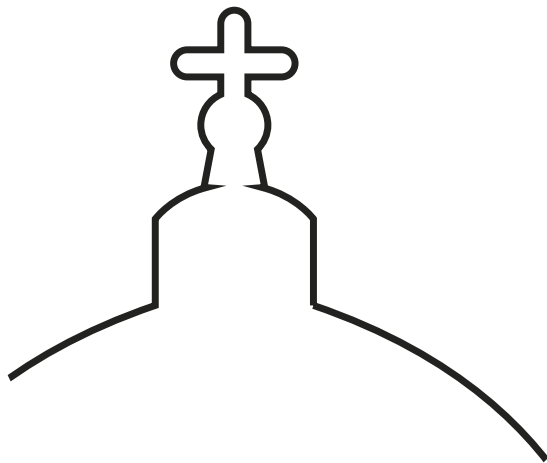
⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 410–11.

⁵ Ibid., 411.

⁶ Ibid., 411.

This concept of the innocent making reparation to God on behalf of the guilty is an important pattern for addressing clerical abuse and related evils, which involve the two fundamental forms of relational brokenness as addressed by the great commandments (love God with your whole heart, and love your neighbor as yourself⁷): the first in which we treat God with indifference, and the second in which we exploit and harm one another.⁸

Communal reparation through Christ



Reparation through Christ offers us a model for addressing the wounds caused by abuse, through a renewal our bond with His sacrifice. The devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, introduced through Margaret Mary, the “most innocent disciple of His Heart”,⁹ reminds us of the importance of living as a cohesive community in which each person, with their own gifts and talents, partakes in the love and redemption that Christ offers us.

When clergy, religious, and laity fail to respond to the love of Christ, the whole community (with the exception of victims/survivors themselves) is called to a collective act of reparation. As emphasised in the Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, reparation is not merely an individual duty but a shared responsibility of the entire community, fostering an environment of care and mutual respect.¹⁰

In facing the tragedy of abuse, the Church must acknowledge her debt of reparation to God, to victims/survivors, and to the community. This demands the commitment of all, whereby even those who are not directly guilty, unite themselves with Christ in bearing the weight of reparation. Through acts of love and justice, we mirror the reconciliation that Christ offers us through His sacrifice.¹¹ The Encyclical invites us to see each act of reparation as an opportunity to strengthen communal bonds and promote peace.¹²

In this context, it is essential to recall St. Paul’s exhortation in his First Letter to the Corinthians: as a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.¹³ Gratitude helps us to recognise our role as members of a larger community, called to live in the light of Christ’s love.

⁷ Matthew 22:36–40.

⁸ FRANCIS, *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020). There are other forms of brokenness as well, including humanity’s broken relationship with the natural world; see FRANCIS, *Laudato Si’* (24 May 2015). See generally Genesis 3.

⁹ PIUS XI, *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (8 May 1928), par. 4, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280508_miserentissimus-redemptor.html.

¹⁰ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, *On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ* (24 October 2024), par. 183, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.

¹¹ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, *On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ* (24 October 2024), par. 184, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See 1 Cor 12:12.

Those who have committed abuse and those who have concealed it have the duty to make reparation, also by facing the civil and ecclesiastical consequences of their actions. It is through a communal response which embraces the suffering and healing of victims/survivors that true reparation be achieved. The community, in Christ, is called to be a sign of hope and renewal for the Church and for society.

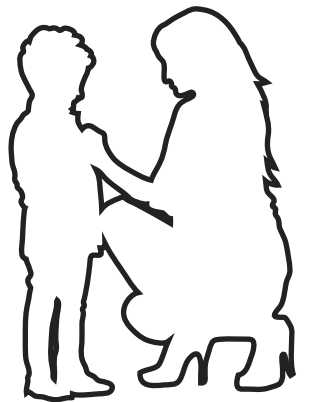
What must be repaired

Sexual abuse in Catholic settings, and especially sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clergy, religious, and other Church personnel, causes severe and overlapping forms of harm. The harms to victims/survivors and the betrayal of Christ’s love are intertwined, because Christ, as victim and priest, is intrinsically close to victims.¹⁴ One cannot harm one of Christ’s precious “little ones” (Matthew 18:6) without betraying, harming, and, indeed, angering Christ.

Just as the harms to Christ and to victims/survivors of abuse are intertwined, reparations to God and to victims/survivors are also intertwined. This is an application of a broader principle: both Pope Francis and Saint John Paul II taught that “the true reparation asked by the heart of the Saviour [is to] unite filial love for God and love of neighbor”.¹⁵

This uniting of love of God and love of neighbor requires us to be intentional in combining reparations to God and reparations to victims. There can be no adequate reparations to God, no adequate prayers or devotional practices, unless they are accompanied by concrete acts of reparation to victims.¹⁶ Indeed, the Church is under a divine duty of providing concrete acts of reparations to those victimised by clergy, religious, and other Church leaders.

In short, reparations to victims/survivors are also a form of reparations to Christ, and devotional reparations to Christ are petitions to Him to “mend wounded hearts where the deepest harm was done, and the hurt is most painful”.¹⁷



¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3 (victims are “an image of Jesus”). See also Hebrews 4:14–10:18; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 606–611, 1367.

¹⁵ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos*, *On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ* (24 October 2024), par. 182 (quoting Saint John Paul II), retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Amos 5:21–24 (“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”).

¹⁷ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), par. 185.

Harms to victims/survivors

The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognises that:

Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents...or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them (2356).

Sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults by those who have a position of authority within the Church is a profound violation. Priests and bishops are spiritual fathers to whom the people of God are entrusted, their model being Jesus the Good Shepherd who is willing to lay down His life for His people.¹⁸ Children are similarly entrusted to teachers and staff in Catholic schools. When this profound betrayal is compounded, as it so often has been, by priests, bishops, and religious superiors who, rather than protecting God’s people from “ravenous wolves,” prove themselves not to be shepherds but instead enable and cover up abuse, the harm involved becomes even more markedly associated with the Church. Abuse, enablement of abuse, and the failure to properly respond to reports of abuse can and do poison the very spiritual resources required by victims/survivors for healing — and cause the Church to be associated with trauma, betrayal, and distrust.

Victims/survivors are not helpless — a truth reflected in the very word “survivors”, which reflects their capacity for resilience, agency, courage, healing, a profound spirituality, and advocacy. But the resilience of victims/survivors and their families, and their efforts to secure their own medical, psychological, and spiritual help, does not lessen the responsibility of the Church toward those harmed by the Church. The damage to victims’/survivors’ relationship to the Church cannot be healed without the Church taking responsibility and making reparations.

Our listing of the harms that many victims/survivors experience is a generalized listing, and we acknowledge that the kinds and degrees of harm vary with the individual. Including the most serious harms may be perceived by some as stigmatising and as undermining the human dignity of victims/survivors. Likewise, failing to include other serious harms may be perceived as a minimisation or denial of the profound harms of sexual abuse. There may also be cultural differences with regard to how mental health terms are perceived, in light of stigmas related to mental health labels. There can be no single accurate representation of the harms and sufferings of victims/survivors.

Nonetheless, for purposes of discussing reparations, a broad listing of the kinds of harms in need of repair is appropriate:

A

Undermining the victim's/survivor's relationship to God

B

Creating a profound alienation from the Church

C

Altering the victim's/survivor's personal relationships, including with his or her family of origin, friends, and the Church community

D

Impacting the victim's/survivor's capacity for positive intimate relationships

E

Distorting the victim's/survivor's self-concept, particularly when he or she is wrongfully blamed, abandoned, or stigmatised, which introduces harmful forms of shame and self-loathing

F

Impacting the victim's/survivor's mental health, including causing anxiety and depression, which may lead to suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and even suicide

G

Redirecting the trajectory of the victim's/survivor's life toward injurious spiritual, psychological, and relational pathways

These harms may last a lifetime. Indeed, for most if not all victims/survivors of sexual abuse, the abuse is not just a discrete event or set of events in the past but a profound ongoing event, with both short-term and long-term consequences that, without acknowledgement and treatment, may fester like an untreated wound.¹⁹

We must re-emphasise that the Church’s decades-long pattern of mishandling reports, including abandoning, ignoring, shaming, blaming, and stigmatising victims/survivors, perpetuates the trauma as an ongoing harm. The first objective of repair is to stop the spiritual and emotional bleeding precipitated by the combination of abuse, enablement of abuse, and mishandling of reports of abuse. This is why both new and old cases matter. For new cases, there is the potential for the Church to immediately respond appropriately, which can significantly mitigate the trauma and harm of abuse. For old cases, particularly where the Church failed to respond properly, it is imperative for the Church to proactively reach out to victims/survivors and take responsibility both for the abuse and also for the subsequent failures.

A betrayal of God's love

Sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by those in authority within the Church, and the enablement and cover-up by Church leaders, is a profound betrayal of Christ’s love and of the commitments of ordination and consecration. In Pope Francis’s words, God is “betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons”.²⁰

¹⁸ See John 10:1–11.

¹⁹ FRANCIS, *Address at the end of the Eucharistic concelebration* (24 February 2019), p. 6: “The evil that they have experienced leaves them with indelible wounds...”, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.pdf.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 3.



The breadth and scale of abuse and enablement create a larger debt beyond that of each individual case: there is a systemic failure, both locally and globally, that requires repair. Such a profound betrayal requires reparation to God as well as to victims/survivors on behalf of the Church, in the awareness of the spiritual dimensions of the Church's battle against "the spirit of evil".²¹

Harms to family and friends of victims/survivors

Discovering that your beloved child, whom you entrusted to clergy, religious, or Catholic school teachers, was sexually abused by them, is extraordinarily painful. A parent may feel guilt and self-blame whenever their child is harmed, because parents are expected to protect their children. The natural empathy that parents, grandparents, siblings, other family members, and close friends feel for the suffering of their loved ones means that many will absorb some of the trauma and ongoing pain of the victim/survivor. Family and friends will also experience betrayal and alienation from the Church — especially if the Church fails to respond appropriately to reports of the abuse, or enabled the abuse through failures to hold the abuser responsible. Family and friends may find themselves questioning their Catholic faith at such times, and asking themselves how God could have permitted such a horrible thing to happen, through the Church, to their loved one.

Harms to the broader Church community

Pope Francis acknowledged that the abuse of children in the Church "is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility".²² Abuse, along with the enablement of abuse, has caused a profound disruption in the relationship of the laity to the clergy, leading many to leave the Church. The laity have frequently felt deeply betrayed by the clergy.

The degree of such harms has varied greatly from place to place. Repairing such harms may be a multigenerational task in some places. In other places, the impetus is to prevent such a severe loss of confidence from ever occurring.

Harms to innocent clergy and religious

A significant incidence of abuse by clergy, religious, and other Church personnel, and especially the mishandling of these cases by Church leaders, may create a difficult and, in many cases, hostile environment for the vast majority of clergy and religious who are not involved in such crimes. Environments of distrust of clergy and religious by the laity and public may cause priests and religious to be stigmatised, casting a pall of suspicion and self-doubt. In addition, a sense of discouragement may develop among the clergy regarding its efforts in safeguarding when the greater public persists in believing that little is being accomplished.

Harms to children and adolescents

Children and adolescents growing up in regions and localities where sexual abuse in a Church setting has become notorious can experience multiple harms, even if they are not themselves direct subjects of abuse. These harms include:

- a) A fear and distrust of priests, bishops, and religious — and even teachers, counselors, and youth leaders in Church settings — which can undermine their relationship to the Church and separate them from spiritually nurturing experiences.
- b) An unwillingness on the part of priests, bishops, religious, teachers, counselors, and youth leaders to nurture and mentor children and adolescents, based on fears of being unjustly accused or because of over-restrictive safeguarding protocols. Jesus called the children to Himself, and Pope Francis characteristically called for shepherds to have the "smell of the sheep".²³ But in environments of fear and suspicion, the necessary boundaries of safeguarding can become barriers — and children can be viewed as too dangerous for interactions. This is gravely harmful to the development and spiritual formation of children and adolescents.

Harms to the Church's capacity to reach society beyond the Church community

Many Church teachings are addressed to all people, not merely the Church community. Such teachings address diverse topics important to society, including marriage and family life, bioethics, social justice, human trafficking, poverty, migration, and the environment.

A Church without credibility cannot teach effectively — and again, Pope Francis recognized that the abuse of children in the Church "is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility".²⁴ This loss of credibility deprives societies of a valuable source of moral and ethical authority on a broad range of issues that are themselves unrelated to sexual abuse. The loss of credibility is presumably greatest on issues related to human rights, human dignity, marriage, family life, and human sexuality.

Implementing repair, and the interrelated pillars of Conversional Justice

As discussed in the pilot Annual Report, the interrelated pillars of Conversional Justice include truth, justice, reparation, and institutional reform (which focuses here on prevention).²⁵

Reparation, whether to God, victims/survivors, the laity, or the community, requires a foundation of truth. Covering up abuse to protect the reputation of the Church and Church leaders is an affront to God and exacerbates the harms of abuse. The Church's acknowledgement of what is true about abuse, both in individual cases and systemically, is important to the reparation of victims/survivors. Truth-seeking may require going beyond civil and Church disciplinary proceedings to include investigatory commissions.

Reparation pertains to healing what has been broken. It is most often discussed in reference to victims/survivors, although in its theological sense it also pertains to wrongs against God. There are many specific forms of reparation to victims/survivors.

²¹ Ibid., p. 4: "[W]e need to take up the spiritual means that the Lord himself teaches: humiliation, self-accusation, prayer and penance" in order "to overcome the spirit of evil".

²² Ibid., p. 3.

²³ FRANCIS, *With the Smell of the Sheep: The Pope Speaks to Priests, Bishops, and Other Shepherds* (Orbis Books, 2017).

²⁴ FRANCIS, *Address at the end of the Eucharistic concelebration* (24 February 2019), p. 3.

²⁵ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, *Annual Report* (reporting period: 2023), Introduction, retrieved at <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/universal-guidelines-framework/>.

Bringing the guilty to justice is important to repair, as it fosters accountability, transparency, and acknowledgement of the seriousness of the wrongs committed.

Prevention, through safeguarding and institutional reform, is equally important to repair. Once the Church demonstrates success in preventing abuse, and in responding properly to old cases and to any new cases that may arise, the environment of fear, mistrust, and betrayal may dissipate over time and be replaced by a sense of trust, care, and safety.

Listening

It is imperative that Church representatives, and especially Church leaders, listen to victims/survivors tell their stories. Such listening is important to the healing of victims/survivors and also is a means of conversion for Church leaders. The act of listening requires engagement, empathy, presence, openness, care, and concern. Perhaps paradoxically, the most reparative listening does not immediately offer solutions or claim to fix or repair; the very act of engaged listening offers a first best step and pathway toward repair.²⁶

Bishops, priests, and religious may feel inadequate when it comes to listening to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in Church contexts. Some may feel that this is best done by professional psychologists or counselors — and there is certainly an important role for professionals who are trained to provide trauma-informed treatment. Nonetheless, professionals are no substitute for the experience of victims/survivors being listened to by Church authorities. There is an irreplaceable significance when bishops and priests, on behalf of the Church, listen to victims/survivors of abuse by Church personnel that was enabled by Church leaders.

It is important that these acts of listening be undertaken by those who are innocent of the wrongs involved. The guilty include not only those who sexually abused children or vulnerable adults, but also those who enabled the abuse by knowingly failing to bring abusers to account, subjecting victims/survivors to further abuse. The guilty also include those who mishandled reports of abuse, further traumatising victims/survivors and denying them truth, justice, and reparations. Bishops and priests who are not guilty of such wrongs are uniquely situated to listen and apologise, with open hearts, to victims/survivors of clerical sexual abuse.

In fact, victims/survivors are likely to be re-traumatised by direct encounters with those who harmed them. The guilty tend to minimise, excuse, and explain their own wrongs, which harms rather than helps their victims. Too often, direct encounters between abusers and victims/survivors



have been manipulated into forced forgiveness, which then becomes a tool of impunity by which abusers escape all consequences and are allowed to continue their destructive crimes.

Those guilty of abuse and enabling abuse have a different pathway of reparation, which may be initiated by the Church in its disciplinary role of holding them accountable (and which may also involve civil actions), so that they may begin to grasp the full consequences of what they have done. Victims/survivors should not be made to be or feel responsible for the spiritual rescue of their abusers, which is not their burden to bear. That burden falls to the Church.

Apologies

Church authorities need to apologise to victims/survivors, as well as to others harmed: their families, the Church community, and the broader society.

Public apologies may reach the broadest audience of those harmed. Public apologies 1) specify the acts and omissions for which the apology is offered, 2) address the categories of persons harmed, and 3) identify the harms. Public apologies may also address the ways in which the Church has taken responsibility and will, in concrete ways, make reparations.

Private apologies to individual victims/survivors, if done well, may also be meaningful to those victims/survivors interested in receiving such apologies. As with listening, these apologies are best delivered by Church representatives who are innocent of the wrongs in question. Church representatives apologising on behalf of the Church is distinct in important ways from abusers and enablers apologising. Repairing the relationship of victims/survivors to the Church requires, as one necessary step, that those innocent of the abuses (with the exception of victims/survivors themselves) nonetheless take responsibility, on behalf of the Church, for the wrongs committed by clergy, religious, and other Church personnel, and convey concern for each victim/survivor.

Public and private apologies on behalf of the Church normally should not include a request for forgiveness from victims/survivors. Apologies should simply be offered without asking for anything in return. The question of forgiveness will arise over time according to the emotional and spiritual healing process and needs of victims/survivors, not according to the wishes of the Church for closure or the wishes of the guilty to be forgiven. Apologies are an initial yet inchoate step of reparation by the Church, and it undercuts the apology to use it as an occasion to ask for forgiveness, which will feel to many victims/survivors like an act of spiritual manipulation.

Separating repair of victims/survivors from repair of abusers and enablers

It is necessary to put the repair and healing of victims/survivors on a separate pathway from the repentance and repair of abusers and enablers. The process of abusers and enablers sincerely taking full responsibility for their actions and omissions may be long and arduous. Abusers often spend decades rationalising and minimising their abusive behaviour, and are practiced in effective means of avoiding discovery and accountability. Enablers, in turn, may have sincerely believed they were “protecting the Church”. The process of reversing these destructive (to others and self) habits of



²⁶ FRANCIS, *Address at the end of the Eucharistic concelebration* (24 February 2019), p. 6: “Listening heals the hurting person, and likewise heals us of our egoism, aloofness and lack of concern, of the attitude shown by the priest and the Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan”, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_0190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.pdf. See generally Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, *Culture of Healing* (2022), available at <https://editricelas.it/libri/822-culture-of-healing.html>. See also FRANCIS, *Listening with the ear of the heart* (24 January 2022), retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20220124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>.

the heart and mind, and of walking pathways of repentance, penance, and reparation, may take years or decades, and in some instances not much progress will be made during the abuser's lifetime. Given these difficulties and trajectories, abusers and enablers of abuse often are generally not capable of listening and apologising to victims/survivors — in ways that are productive, and not simply re-traumatising.

From a practical standpoint, abusers and enablers should be at risk of state criminal and civil liability as well as to Church disciplinary proceedings. State and Church proceedings often involve a presumption of innocence and may take years to conclude. Abusers and enablers may be advised by their attorneys to remain silent and refrain from admissions or apologies. There thus may be a long period during which abusers and enablers are focused on limiting the negative consequences to which they are subject, and are not likely to act for the benefit of those they abused.

Victim/survivor advocates and Procurators

Many victim/survivor advocates are competent and trained individuals who accompany victims/survivors in organizing and navigating the various reparative processes, such as meetings in which victims/survivors share their stories with Church authorities and/or receive in-person apologies. Victim/survivor advocates also can play a useful role in explaining complex disciplinary Church proceedings, and can represent the interests of victims/survivors at such proceedings.

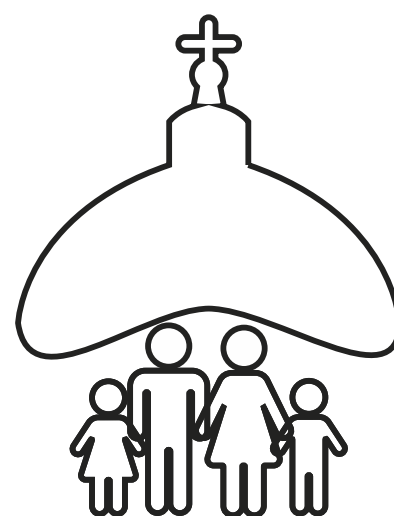
This role of victim/survivor advocate is specific to the Church. It does not carry over to civil or criminal proceedings, which have their own protocols for victim/survivor advocates and legal representation, but rather alludes to the figure of the local Procurator that was introduced for further study and discussion in the main findings and observations of the Commission's pilot Annual Report (for reporting year 2023). Exploring the role of local Procurators through the lens of reparations might shed light on an encouraging opportunity to establish an institutional figure to promote Conversational Justice at the local level.

Local centres for the assistance and accompaniment of victims/survivors and their families

The Commission has launched the capacity-building Memorare Initiative to help fulfill Pope Francis's call:

*I urge you to assist the Conferences of Bishops...in establishing suitable centres where individuals who have suffered abuse, and their family members, can find acceptance and an attentive hearing, and be accompanied in a process of healing and justice.*²⁷

The mandate for the Memorare Initiative, and for other means of achieving similar ends, also comes from *Vos estis lux mundi* (Art. 5, §1):



²⁷ FRANCIS, *Address to the Members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors* (29 April 2022), p. 3, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/april/documents/20220429-pontcommissione-tutelaminori.pdf>.

The ecclesiastical Authorities shall commit themselves to ensuring that those who state that they have been harmed, together with their families, are to be treated with dignity and respect, and, in particular, are to be:

- a) *welcomed, listened to, and supported, including through provision of specific services;*
- b) *offered spiritual assistance;*
- c) *offered medical assistance, including therapeutic and psychological assistance, as required by the specific case.*

The Church will need to provide training for those who engage in the critical acts of listening, supporting, and accompanying victims/survivors. In some cases, given limited resources, it may be necessary in early phases to begin with trained non-professionals and trained volunteers, with a longer-term goal of professionalisation of these functions.

Spiritual assistance

Vos estis lux mundi (Art. 5, §1b) requires that the Church offer “spiritual assistance” to victims/survivors. Rather than abandoning victims/survivors of sexual abuse in Catholic settings, the Church should provide training to those within the Church who could offer spiritual assistance in a sensitive and appropriate way.

Those who provide spiritual direction, counselling, and other forms of spiritual assistance within the Church should correspondingly be offered training as to the spiritual needs of victims/survivors and best practices on how to respond to those needs.

Counselling, medical, and other services outside of the Church

Vos estis lux mundi (Art. 5, §1c) also requires that victims/survivors are “offered medical assistance, including therapeutic and psychological assistance, as required by the specific case”. Even when these services are available within the Church, many victims/survivors may prefer to access such services outside of the Church in which they were abused. Hence, the primary means of meeting this mandate would often be by referral (if desired) and more generally by compensating the victim/survivor for the costs of such services, to the degree that they are not covered by insurance or similar means.

Financial compensation

The rules, customs, and practices within state legal systems vary as to the availability of financial compensation for victims/survivors of sexual abuse in Catholic settings. In some jurisdictions, victims/survivors are unlikely to receive any financial compensation from state legal systems. In other jurisdictions, large-scale financial awards have forced dioceses to seek legal protection in bankruptcy courts. Clearly, there is no uniform practice across jurisdictions.

Beyond the issue of financial awards ordered by courts, there remains the question of the Church voluntarily providing financial compensation beyond payment for specific services for victims/survivors (medical, therapeutic, and psychological). While there is a basis in Canon Law for the injured party to bring “a contentious action to repair damages”, it remains limited in scope (Canon 1729). Moreover, the fundamental trauma-informed question persists: How can such harms be measured

financially (apart from paying for needed services to victims/survivors)? Ethical dilemmas include the question of who pays; the potential impact on the ministries, services, and in some cases even the financial survival of local Churches and religious congregations; and the impacts on those served spiritually and practically by local Churches and religious congregations. Such questions require further study.

Conclusion

Figures of authority within the Church who perpetrate or enable abuse have perhaps viewed themselves as too essential and important to be held accountable. The Church's response to abuse should not repeat the same mistakes. The Church believes herself to be central to God's plan for humanity.²⁸ But God's promises to the Church are not a "too essential to fail" free pass of impunity: to the contrary, the Church needs to remember that judgement begins within the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). Now is the time for the Church to make reparation to God, centrally including reparation to the vulnerable and abused children of God, Christ's "little ones",²⁹ who are "an image of Jesus".³⁰

Conversional Justice is necessary to this pathway of reparation because without "a continuous and profound conversion of hearts, attested by concrete and effective actions",³¹ nothing will be accomplished.

The Commission also follows the pathway of continuous conversion of the heart — and concrete actions. We continue to learn from interactions with victims/survivors. The Church at all levels (local, national, regional, and global) should continue to seek participation and input from victims/survivors regarding safeguarding policies and practices. Victims/survivors should not be viewed as passive recipients of services but rather as the centre of the Church's efforts to reform and safeguard. At the same time, victims/survivors should not be coerced or manipulated into particular roles, nor should they be assigned the responsibility of repairing the failings of a Church that betrayed them. Just as the Church offers accompaniment, leaving it to the individual victim/survivor to determine whether and to what extent to accept the offer, the Church should invite victims/survivors to play a central role in reform and response and safeguarding if they so choose.

We also continue to learn from our ongoing interactions with national bishops' conferences, religious orders, dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and others. We continue to create additional opportunities to learn from experts and organisations with similar concerns about safeguarding, including obtaining data from outside the Church that can help us evaluate what is happening inside the Church.

Pope Francis's placement of the Commission within the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith gives us the opportunity to journey with the entire Church on this pathway of continuous conversion and dialogue. The interactions created by *ad limina* visits and by our presence in the Roman Curia have become our foundation for working toward the goal of incorporating safeguarding into the day-to-day governance and work of the Church at all levels.

The development and integration of safeguarding protocols is accompanied by the need to respond to the crises and severe harms that have arisen from the Church's grievous failures. Conversional Justice, and its interconnected pillars of truth, justice, reparation, and institutional reform (prevention), provides a pathway for the Church's responses to past failures in a way that, if properly applied, can lead to the prevention of future abuse. We plan to continue with the application of Conversional Justice, and its various pillars, each year through the Annual Reports.

The process of Conversional Justice must continue in full awareness of Jesus's admonition, "Apart from me you can do nothing," (John 15:5) — and yet in the hope that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). As Pope Francis explained:

"Repairing the irreparable"...thus leads us to hope that every wound can be healed, however deep it may be. Complete reparation may at times seem impossible, such as when...loved ones are definitively lost, or when certain situations have become irremediable. Yet the intention to make amends, and to do so in a concrete way, is essential for the process of reconciliation and a return to peace of heart."³²



²⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 737–739, 748–962.

²⁹ Matthew 18:6.

³⁰ FRANCIS, *Address at the end of the Eucharistic Concelebration* (24 February 2019), p. 3, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.pdf.

³¹ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (25 March 2023), p. 1, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/20230325-motu-proprio-vos-estis-lux-mundi-aggiornato.pdf.

³² FRANCIS, *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), par. 186 (quoting Address of Pope Francis to the Participants in the International Colloquium, "RÉPARER L'IRRÉPARABLE," 4 May 2024), retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20241024-enciclica-dilexit-nos.html>.

Annual Report Victim/ Survivor Focus Group

The pilot Annual Report (for reporting period 2023) summarised the Commission's multidimensional engagements with victims/survivors over the course of the Commission's ten-year history. This second Annual Report builds on that history. The pilot Annual Report also described the Commission's engagement with victims/survivors through a new focus group, initially piloted in the Americas, labeled the Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Group (AR Focus Group). This focus group was designed to have a more targeted focus on the Annual Report itself. The Commission indicated its commitment to reviewing the results from this pilot AR Focus Group and to improve and expand its application across each of the regions for the second Annual Report.

In reporting on this expanded approach in this second Annual Report, the Commission notes some clarifications. First, while the term used is "focus group", the methodology involves individual listening sessions with victims/survivors, who do not interact with each other. Second, this focus group does not constitute a form of social science research. Nor is it a form of therapy, although the Commission certainly acknowledges the importance of such, and the focus group methodology includes steps to avoid harm given the vulnerability of victims/survivors. Finally, the focus group does not replace other forms of ongoing engagement with victims/survivors, and thus is not designed to constitute the only or even primary form of the Commission's engagement with victims/survivors.

Objectives

The AR Focus Group is formed for the specific purpose of the Annual Report and constitutes an organised form of inclusion. It invites victim/survivor perspectives on the Annual Report's topics, methodologies, and certain portions of the text, and provides an intentional way of incorporating victim/survivor perspectives on the Annual Reports, both as documents and as representations of the Commission's ongoing safeguarding mission and processes.



General methodology

The AR Focus Group consultations provided victims/survivors the opportunity to read and reflect on specific parts of the drafted text of the second Annual Report. The pilot Annual Report, which is publicly available, also was offered to them for their consideration. Participants were then invited, in individual listening sessions, to share their reactions and perspectives on the accuracy and relevance of the Commission's findings. A set of general questions was offered by the facilitators to help guide these reflections. Since the second Annual Report focuses on reparations, many of the questions explored the participants' views and experiences regarding reparations. The facilitators took detailed notes on these reflections, which (without identifying participants) were used as part of the Commission's synodal revision of the text of the second Annual Report.

Selection criteria for participants

- 1 **Personal experience:** Individuals were selected who have directly or indirectly experienced sexual abuse within the context of the Catholic Church, and who are willing and able to share their experiences and opinions. There must be a basis for believing that a given participant would not be re-traumatised by their participation.
- 2 **Diversity:** Representation was sought from diverse ages, genders, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds to capture a broad range of perspectives.
- 3 **Voluntary participation:** Steps were taken to ensure that participants understood the objectives and methodologies, were aware of their right to end their participation at any time, and were participating voluntarily. Participants signed a written informed consent form.
- 4 **Confidentiality:** The methodology was designed to ensure that the results would be reported in a format that did not identify the participants, to provide for their confidentiality and anonymity.
- 5 **Psychological support:** Be prepared to navigate information provided by the facilitator during the Focus Group listening sessions on where to find professional psychological support services, should participants need.

Selection criteria for facilitators

- 1 **Experience and training:** Facilitators were selected with a background in conducting sensitive and compassionate listening sessions with vulnerable populations.
- 2 **Empathy, sensitivity, and knowledge of sexual abuse:** Facilitators were selected with an emphasis on demonstrated empathy, sensitivity, and an understanding of sexual abuse and its impact on victims'/survivors' experiences.

3

Knowledge of the Church context: Facilitators were sought with knowledge of the Church setting, and an appreciation of the unique challenges faced by victims/survivors within this environment.

4

Cultural competence: Where possible, the facilitator was fluent in the/a primary language of the victim/survivor and came from a similar culture. Otherwise, facilitators were selected according to cross-cultural competencies and understanding of cultural differences to ensure effective communication.

Methodological steps

STEP 1

The facilitator met on an individual basis with victims/survivors who had been identified as potential participants in the Focus Group. The facilitator provided the following background to the victim/survivor:

- » An explanation of the Annual Report project, including its origins in the Commission mandate, the development of the methodology, the pilot Focus Group in the Americas, and the publication of the pilot Annual Report.
- » An explanation of the Commission's focus on reparations in the second Annual Report.
- » The objectives and desired outcomes of this year's Focus Group.
- » An overview of the logistics of participating, including the informed consent form, the victims'/survivors' right to participate as they feel comfortable, the data protection measures in place for their privacy, and the Commission's request for confidentiality in reviewing the draft Annual Report text.

The facilitator offered the victim/survivor the opportunity to ask any questions. Finally, the facilitator confirmed that the victim/survivor would like to continue with this process as a participant.

Regional facilitators shared the list of general questions along with various parts of the second Annual Report, as agreed to, including the text of the Introduction on reparation as well as the text for the countries and/or religious orders in Section 1 and the region in Section 2 that were most relevant for the given participant. Participants could review this material at their own pace.

STEP 3

Regional facilitators conducted listening sessions with the participants on an individual basis, after again confirming their consent. The facilitators took detailed notes of these conversations, while ensuring full adherence to local data protection laws and to the assurances of anonymity. The facilitators used the general questions to help guide the conversation, while adjusting as necessary based on the specific participant's needs and desires.

STEP 2

Upon completion of the consultation session, the participant received a summary of his or her observations, some information about the general publication timeline of the second Annual Report, contact details in order to remain in touch with any questions that might emerge, and a description of resources available for support.

Findings

The Commission expresses immense gratitude to the dozens of victims/survivors who directly participated in the Annual Report Victim/Survivor Focus Group across the Commission's four regions. The Commission also extends its continued gratitude to all of those victims/survivors who have shared their truth with the Commission since its establishment. Certainly, the findings from this year's Focus Group are consistent with the Commission's learnings from its ongoing listening ministry. Indeed, this year's findings represent a strong continuity with the Commission's body of knowledge, collected through the generous testimony of victims/survivors over more than a decade.³³

To honor and uphold the lived experiences of these victims/survivors, the Commission offers the following summary of findings, including some indications on where those findings have illuminated and confirmed the Commission's recommendations throughout this Annual Report. By centering around the testimony of victims/survivors, and pointing to its impact on the text, the Commission notes the irreplaceable contribution that the victims/survivors have made to the contents of this Annual Report — and to the Commission's efforts to fulfill its mandate of safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults within the Church around the world.

● Accountability for Church leaders

The lack of accountability for Church leaders was a frequent issue raised by victims/survivors. The urgent need for bishops and major superiors to be held accountable for negligence and cover-up was repeatedly stressed. One victim/survivor explained that the local bishop received their report but then blocked contact and cut communication once the bishop realized that the case was a sexual harassment crime. Similarly, many other victims/survivors testified about having to submit multiple reports because previous reports "disappeared". One victim/survivor explained, "I sent two letters to the bishop telling him what happened, that was five years ago, and I still have not received an answer". The Commission takes note of this call to greater accountability for Church leaders along with the need for a clearer canonical process of resignation or removal in these cases of negligence and cover-up.

● Access to information for victims/survivors

The fundamental need for victims/survivors to have access to information about their case was a significant topic of concern. This was especially expressed as an important component of the healing journeys for victims/survivors. One victim/survivor explained, "You want to know and they don't tell you anything. It's like being sent to purgatory". The Commission has long noted

³³ PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS, *Culture of Healing* (2022), available at <https://editricelas.it/libri/822-culture-of-healing.html>.

this lack of information for victims/survivors and highlighted this shortcoming in its first Annual Report (for reporting year 2023), calling for greater access to information for victims/survivors regarding their ongoing cases. In this second Annual Report, the Commission continues to highlight this concern in its recommendations to the local Churches, which have primary responsibility for communicating updates to individual victims/survivors.

● *Healing through truth-telling*

The need for the Church to acknowledge its mistakes in response to the scourge of abuse emerged as a powerful call from victims/survivors for the Church's renewal. One victim/survivor said, "The Church itself is in need of healing, and by acknowledging past harm and embracing humility, it can restore trust and integrity". Another victim/survivor said, "The truth must be made public". Yet another victim's/survivor's contribution revolved almost entirely around the concept of recognition, explaining that public recognition is at the core of any process of reparations. Public acknowledgement is essential to prevent the resurgence of victims'/survivors' pain, which can occur when they feel ignored or silenced.



The Commission fully echoes this call for truth-telling, including the adoption of a Conversional Justice framework, which underpins all of its work. Consistent with this call from victims/survivors and the "truth" pillar of Conversional Justice, the Commission recognises and applauds independent truth-telling studies commissioned by the various local Churches covered in Section 1 of this Annual Report. Moreover, the Commission consistently recommends that the local Churches in Section 1 adopt robust communications protocols for effectively sharing information about cases with the public. Indeed, the Commission supports this as an important part of the healing journey for victims/survivors and their communities.

● *The Church's incomplete understanding of reparations*

The Church's incomplete understanding of reparations emerged as an impediment to victims'/survivors' healing journey. One victim/survivor explained that financial reparations, when structured independently and fairly, can significantly impact victims'/survivors' lives by enabling them to access necessary psychological care and regain a sense of dignity. However, many victims/survivors shared that financial compensation is often viewed with suspicion, as if it places a price on suffering. Similarly, victims/survivors cited Church leaders favoring financial settlements over genuine accountability. One victim/survivor said, "They offered me \$20,000, but all I wanted was an apology". Another victim/survivor shared, "The bishop's response was inadequate, focused only on money, and failed to bring justice". Yet another victim/survivor stressed that financial compensation is not the core need.

The Commission has consistently heard this perspective from victims/survivors. The primary need from victims/survivors is not financial compensation but rather recognition of harm, genuine apologies, and meaningful action to prevent future abuses. In many cases, however, victims/survivors report that the Church has responded with empty settlements, performative gestures, and a persistent refusal to engage with victims/survivors in good faith.

The introduction of this Annual Report examines the "reparations" pillar of Conversional Justice and seeks to promote a more mature approach to the practice of reparations — one that better reflects the needs and concerns of victims/survivors. Victims/survivors suggested specific examples, including memorials, dedicated liturgies, public acknowledgements, formal letters acknowledging harm, pastoral accompaniment, and abuse prevention measures. The Commission acknowledges the broad range of practices that are included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages, and welcomes additional insight into their effectiveness. Section 1 of this Annual Report includes requests to each Conference for examples of their experiences with reparations and how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church.

● *The lack of psychological services*

Victims/survivors especially highlighted the lack of psychological care provided to them and their communities. One victim/survivor said, "I was lucky to find a therapist. Many victims don't get that chance". Another specified that this form of reparation "should not depend on individual advocacy or luck but be a structured and guaranteed process". Yet another victim/survivor insisted that counselling and mental health services should be readily available for victims/survivors, while also emphasising that families are deeply impacted and should also receive support. The Commission highlights the importance of offering psychological services to victims/survivors in the introduction to this Annual Report, and it will continue following developments in the local Churches as required by its mandate. The Commission has made this monitoring a prominent part of its Memorare Initiative, which is expanding throughout the Global South and is in dialogue with local Churches all around the world.

● *The need for a more listening Church*

A consistent and resounding point emerged around victims'/survivors' desire to feel heard and validated in their experiences. They stressed the need for "open discussions about the effects of abuse...to dismantle harmful beliefs" and advised that "the laity must be educated to challenge harmful stereotypes". Many victims/survivors also shared the importance of adopting more trauma-informed pastoral language in order to promote a more listening Church — a Church that respects victims'/survivors' dignity and agency. Several victims/survivors specifically cited the need to avoid any language that alludes to victims'/survivors' suffering as a redemptive act. Victims/survivors explicitly called this a theological distortion, manipulative and spiritually abusive. Victims/survivors also explained the importance of avoiding language that suggests the Church is innocent or that makes reparation seem optional or abstract. Victims/survivors gave specific examples of useful language that can be further introduced to accompany this conversion, including "spiritual trauma"; "long-term psychological harm"; "moral injury"; and "duty of justice".



The Commission especially integrates these concerns in Section 2 of this Annual Report, which highlights strong cultural stereotypes and stigmas around abuse. It also acknowledges these concerns in certain local Churches covered in Section 1.

Victims/survivors went on to share their experiences of reporting their case to Church authorities, only to be met with denial and dismissal instead of sensitive listening. One victim/survivor explained that “the bishop stated that he did not want to hear more about the case”. In the context of reporting their case, another victim/survivor said, “The betrayal by the institution, which claims to uphold moral authority, was more painful than the abuse itself”.

The Commission notes clearly that victims/survivors need and deserve openness in addressing these issues, rather than having to face impediments such as silence and dismissal. As one victim/survivor said, “Taking victims/survivors at their word should be the default position”. The Commission especially promotes this paradigm in its recommendations to the local Churches in Section 1, regarding their development of accessible and welcoming reporting structures in the dioceses, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission also reflects this need in its recommendation for an increase in safeguarding professionals trained in trauma-informed listening and report reception.

- **Properly handling perpetrators**

A consistent concern emerged with victims/survivors regarding the proper management of perpetrators. Many victims/survivors testified to the tendency in Church communities, especially among the clergy, to refer to abuse only as a sin, rather than a crime. Victims/survivors made it clear that they should not have to live in uncertainty about whether perpetrators are truly being held accountable. This especially includes the practice of transferring perpetrators to other dioceses. One victim/survivor explained, “The priest who abused me was sent to another country, where he continued his work”. The Commission notes that this practice can be a source of obstruction of justice and one that victims/survivors rightly highlight as a significant concern and ongoing risk for further abuse. The development of robust protocols for handling perpetrators is a recommendation that the Commission makes to many local Churches in Section 1 of this Annual Report.

- **Vetting of all Church personnel**

Victims/survivors underlined the need for rigorous vetting of all Church personnel, in order to minimise the risk of abuse. When discussing these provisions for the clergy and consecrated religious, victims/survivors specified that this should include psychiatric evaluations before ordination and recurring assessments throughout their priesthood. Moreover, victims/survivors emphasised the need to vet non-clergy personnel working in the local Church. One victim/survivor cited the need to vet all Church personnel who interact with minors or vulnerable adults. In Section 1 of this Annual Report, the Commission consistently makes specific recommendations to many of the local Churches about rigorous safeguarding background checks for all clergy, religious, and other pastoral agents arriving to the dioceses/orders from other ecclesiastical jurisdictions, and acknowledges and applauds the local Churches that cite this as part of their policies and procedures.

- **Lack of clear reporting structures**

Victims/survivors frequently cited a lack of clear reporting structures. In fact, one said, “The Church actively creates barriers to receiving complaints”, while another explained, “There is no

formal structure in place to handle abuse cases”. Similarly, another victim/survivor said that there are no diocesan contact persons or victim/survivor support structures. The Commission notes these observations with particular concern, especially given the requirement of *Vos estis lux mundi* for each diocese to have an accessible and public reporting structure. Section 1 of this Annual Report highlights local Churches’ shortcomings in meeting these requirements and recommends the capacity-building Memorare Initiative to any Church that might benefit from additional resources to help ensure accessible and public reporting structures.

- **Safeguarding policies and training across all dioceses**

Victims/survivors underlined the importance of safeguarding policies and training and stressed that in some local Churches the safeguarding protocol is not published, thus preventing an important exercise of accountability and transparency. One victim/survivor requested over a period of five years to see the safeguarding protocol, without success. Victims/survivors shared a broader concern that safeguarding policies and procedures might be officially in place but are not being implemented. One victim/survivor explained that lay administrators in their diocese were unaware of any safeguarding protocols, raising significant concerns about the inculturation of these policies. Another victim/survivor noted that training around these guidelines was perceived as a “tick-box” exercise rather than one soliciting meaningful engagement. Victims/survivors often framed these concerns as a structural — and not merely individual — abuse and complicity, which must be recognized and addressed. All of these observations are consistent with the Commission’s concerns, expressed in Sections 1 and 2, about the effective implementation of the local Churches’ safeguarding guidelines.

- **Collaboration with civil or other bodies independent of the Church hierarchy**

Victims/survivors stressed the importance of investigations and reporting systems that are independent from the Church hierarchy. This includes the importance of cooperation and collaboration with the civil authorities. One victim/survivor explained that Church leaders often have conflicts of interest. Another further explained that friendships and personal relationships among clergy often create these conflicts of interest. The Commission acknowledges the need for a trustworthy reporting and investigation system and consistently stresses the importance of involving lay experts who do not belong to the Church hierarchy. It also consistently recommends an external audit mechanism to ensure an independent review of the Church’s safeguarding apparatus. Finally, the Commission recommends a defined and open collaboration with the civil authorities, to ensure that victims/survivors can pursue justice through the civil realm if they so wish.

- **Collaborating with victims/survivors and their advocacy groups**

Victims/survivors underlined the need for Church leaders to better collaborate with victims/survivors and their advocacy groups in the development of Church policy. One victim/survivor shared that the victim/survivor community often feels excluded from shaping safeguarding efforts in the local Church, despite having a lived experience that could help inform Church policy around abuse. The Commission recognises the important insights that victims/survivors can offer to the Church’s safeguarding efforts and consistently recommends the inclusion of vic-

tims/survivors in policy development to the local Churches covered in Section 1 of this Annual Report. The Commission applauds those Churches and religious congregations that provide examples of such collaborations.

- ***Resistance to safeguarding reforms***

Many victims/survivors cite strong resistance to safeguarding reforms in their local Churches. As one asserted, “The Church has successfully standardised dogma and liturgical practice worldwide; why has it failed to standardise abuse response policies?” Victims/survivors further explained that such resistance creates inconsistencies across dioceses, which in turn can create loopholes that allow perpetrators to evade accountability. As one victim/survivor noted, “A lack of consistency across dioceses allows abusers to move undetected”. The Commission addresses these inconsistencies across the various local Churches when it sees them, and especially highlights them as regional trends in Section 2 of this Annual Report.

- ***Retaliation by Church leaders against victims/survivors***

Victims/survivors provided disturbing accounts of retaliation taken by Church leaders toward those who spoke out about their cases of abuse. One victim/survivor recounted this experience: “My brother was a seminarian. The bishop told my family that my complaint could affect his ordination”. Another recalled how a priest in the local Church publicly declared their family excommunicated after they reported the abuse. Yet another recounted, “I reported my case, and the bishop remained silent for months. When I persisted, he sent representatives to gaslight me, saying I was making trouble”. The Commission acknowledges that victims/survivors and their advocates can be at risk of discrimination, professional consequences, and social exclusion, among other forms of retaliation. The Commission brings attention to these risks in Section 2 of this Annual Report. Moreover, the Commission frequently recommends whistleblower protection policies in the local Churches covered in Section 1 of this Annual Report, and highlights and applauds those local Churches that already have a published whistleblower protection policy.

- ***Victim-blaming, stigma, and community rejection: Upholding a culture of silence***

Victims/survivors testified to the culture of silence — the practice of victim-blaming and stigmas that prevent people from reporting abuse. One victim/survivor said, “After I spoke out, my own parish turned against me. People said I was trying to destroy the priest’s reputation”. Victims/survivors consistently explained that they are accused of tempting priests rather than being recognised as victims/survivors of a crime. Faced with community rejection, one victim/survivor insisted, “Parishioners should not judge survivors, but should instead actively participate in making the Church safer”. Indeed, as another victim/survivor explained, “Many victims stop seeking help when their initial disclosure is met with blame”. The Commission acknowledges these unjust cultural practices and especially voices concern about their harmful effects in Section 2 of this Annual Report. The Commission also notes these troubling cultural practices in some of the specific local Churches covered in Section 1 of this Annual Report.

- ***Survivors live among the faithful, often unseen, carrying silent burdens***

Victims/survivors consistently testified to their experience of the Church prioritising the protection of perpetrators over victims/survivors, leaving victims/survivors alone to deal with the aftermath of their abuse. One victim/survivor explicitly said, “Survivors are left alone to face their trauma”. Another victim/survivor explained, “I never asked anyone for help, I tried to live with it alone”. Yet another victim/survivor explained, “A Church that fails to prepare its members on the issue of sexual abuse, not only within the Church but in any social setting, is a Church that is failing in its mission to protect the most vulnerable”. Several victims/survivors suggested specific ideas to combat this lack of sensitization, including discussing abuse in homilies and preparations for the sacraments. The Commission recognises the severe isolation that victims/survivors often feel in facing their trauma and reflects, in Section 2 of this Annual Report, on the impact of a lack of sensitisation to abuse among the Church community, leaving victims/survivors to suffer alone.

- ***Lack of confidentiality***

Victims/survivors attested to local Churches handling their cases with a lack of respect for confidentiality. One victim/survivor explained that his abuse became widely known in his diocese without his consent. The same victim/survivor went on to explain that instead of protecting him, priests and Church members discussed his case openly, violating his privacy. Another victim/survivor testified that Church leaders leaked victim/survivor complaints, exposing victims/survivors to stigma and discrimination. Yet another victim/survivor affirmed, “Church leaders must enforce strict confidentiality to protect survivors”. The Commission recognises that a breach of confidentiality can be harmful and even dangerous for victims/survivors, and especially brings attention to this in Section 2 of this Annual Report. Confidentiality is essential to compliance with moral and civil law.

- ***Cases of ongoing abuse unchecked***

Victims/survivors cited cases of ongoing abuse in their Church communities that have gone unaddressed. One victim/survivor said that she is aware of other priests engaging in sexual relationships with young girls and nuns. Another victim/survivor explained, “Cases of forced abortions among religious sisters are ignored by Church authorities”. Yet another victim/survivor said, “Every time I hear about a current case, I just think: will this never end?” The Commission is deeply concerned about cases of ongoing abuse and repeatedly reminds Church leaders of their responsibility — both legal and moral — to address them in full accordance with the applicable canonical and civil requirements. The Commission’s Study Group on Vulnerability has also begun its work to further explore the concept of vulnerability in accompanying the development of the Church’s understanding of vulnerable adults. In Section 1, the Commission consistently refers the local Churches to the findings of this Study Group.

- ***Marginalised communities facing additional barriers to reporting***

Victims/survivors explained how marginalised communities often face additional barriers to reporting and having their cases of abuse addressed appropriately. One victim/survivor cited the local Church’s strong patriarchal culture that prevents women and girls from speaking out. Another victim/survivor explained, “The seminary authorities only cared about my sexual pref-

erence and not about the abuse I had received from my formator and other seminarians". The Commission is aware of compounding societal factors that increase the risk of gender-based abuse and violence and impede the proper handling of abuse cases, once reported. The Commission especially highlights in Section 2 of this Annual Report how the politicisation and polarisation of gender-based issues has threatened important dialogue and progress around urgent safeguarding concerns.

- **Slow provision of justice**

Victims/survivors deplored the slow administration of justice through Church disciplinary measures. The Commission has long shared this concern expressed by victim/survivors, including in Section 3 of its pilot Annual Report (for reporting period 2023). In Section 1 of the current Annual Report, the Commission notes that this concern is also shared by many bishops, especially in the context of the challenges they face and the need to develop more efficient ways to address disciplinary issues within the Church.

- **The Roman Curia's lack of openness to victims/survivors**

Victims/survivors often perceive the Roman Curia as lacking in sensitivity to victims/survivors. To counter this tendency, one victim/survivor suggested, "When Rome requests reports from dioceses, they should seek victim/survivor perspectives, not just institutional narratives". The Commission notes this concern with attention. Consistent with its very nature, the Commission understands its mandate to include the encouragement of more victim/survivor-sensitive processes, procedures, and input. The Commission documents its promotion of this sensitivity in Section 3 of this Annual Report.

- **Specific amendments given the findings from the AR Focus Group**

After a careful review of the comments from victims/survivors regarding this Annual Report, the Commission made various amendments and improvements to the text. Indeed, the input provided by victims/survivors helped identify several key areas where the text could better reflect issues important to victims/survivors, thus further centering around their lived experiences and perspectives.

Section 1

The Local Church in Focus



This section of the Annual Report explores the safeguarding ministry of the local Churches. Its country-by-country findings and recommendations are primarily based on an analysis of the data collected through the Commission's *ad limina* process, supplemented by other sources as available. Findings and recommendations are organised by country.³⁴ Following the country reports, two religious congregations are presented, one male and one female, that the Commission reviewed during the reporting period.

»»» Data sources

- **Safeguarding-specific questionnaires**

Each episcopal conference and religious congregation under review is presented with a safeguarding-specific questionnaire developed by the Commission. This questionnaire is a standardised data collection tool. The episcopal conferences receive these questionnaires in the preparatory phase of their *ad limina* visits, with enough lead time to allow responses to be submitted ahead of their visit to Rome. In the absence of an analogous ordinary visitation schedule for religious congregations, the Commission reaches out on an *ad hoc* basis to the specific religious congregations that it selects to be included in the Annual Report. As part of that outreach, the Commission formally presents its safeguarding-specific questionnaire, with questions slightly adapted to better capture the safeguarding realities in consecrated life.

Answers to these questions are analysed using the Commissions's draft *Universal Guidelines Framework* to map the conference or congregation's safeguarding policies and procedures.³⁵

³⁴ Due to the size and organisational structure of the Italian Episcopal Conference (with subsidiary regional episcopal conferences), its bishops attended their *ad limina* visits in regional delegations. Therefore, the Commission presents its findings on Italy organised by region.

³⁵ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, *Universal Guidelines Framework*, retrieved at <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/universal-guidelines-framework/>.

● **General quinquennial reports**

As part of the Commission's interdicasterial collaborations across the Roman Curia, the various dicasteries with organisational oversight of the *ad limina* visits have begun to routinely share the integral versions of the general quinquennial responses submitted by each ordinary, as canonically required in the *ad limina* process.³⁶ Although the current questionnaire,³⁷ maintained by the Dicastery for Bishops,³⁸ does not include any safeguarding-specific questions, the Commission has still found important safeguarding-related information within these reports. The Commission's Annual Report Team conducts a comprehensive review of each of these reports in order to further map the safeguarding policies and procedures in the local Churches.

● **Published safeguarding guideline documents**

For each episcopal conference and religious congregation covered, the Commission conducts a canonical review of the conference or congregation's formally published safeguarding guidelines. For the episcopal conferences, this evaluation begins with a thorough review of the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's archive, detailing the evolution of the given conference's guideline documents since the 2011 Circular Letter, which first required their development.³⁹ The most recently published guideline document is then reviewed by the Commission's team of canonists on staff, utilising the draft *Universal Guidelines Framework* as the basis of evaluation.

As part of its initial outreach to the religious congregations, the Commission requests that they submit their most up-to-date safeguarding guidelines. Upon submission, the guideline document is similarly reviewed by the Commission's team of canonists, again utilising the draft *Universal Guidelines Framework* as the basis of evaluation.

● **Official online resources**

The Commission's Annual Report Team conducts a web-based study of any officially published safeguarding-related content for each episcopal conference and religious congregation under review. This includes a thorough review of the conferences' and congregations' own websites, as well as any further published sources noted therein. Findings from this research are coded to provide additional mapping of the safeguarding policies and procedures in the local Churches.

● **Journalistic and academic sources**

The Commission's Annual Report Team similarly conducts a web-based study of any journalistic and academic publications that relate to the conferences' or congregations' safeguarding provisions. Findings from this research are coded to provide additional mapping of the safeguarding policies and procedures at the local level.

● **Findings from the Committee for the Rights of the Child**

Each year, the Commission's Annual Report Team reviews the Committee for the Rights of the Child's public database⁴⁰ for any Church-related safeguarding findings in the countries under review by the Commission. This review covers all of the documentation related to the Committee's standard methodology for its ongoing review of States parties (countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child). This documentation includes mandatory reports submitted by the States parties, shadow reports submitted by civil society organisations (CSOs), parallel reports submitted by national human rights institutions (NHRIs), other relevant stakeholders as determined by the Committee, and official statements from the States parties during the Committee's review sessions.

The Commission collects a coded log of any direct references in this documentation to the Catholic Church and/or clerical sexual abuse. It also reviews these documents for any additional information relevant for addressing sexual abuse in the local Churches. This review includes any relevant data and insights on prevalence, reporting structures, potential exacerbating risk factors, and the like. Results from this analysis are compiled to provide additional mapping of the safeguarding provisions and concerns in the local Churches.

● **Population-level prevalence data**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is the custodian agency for Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 16.2.3, namely, "[The] proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18", and maintains a database of available population-level prevalence estimates of the sexual abuse of minors. In October 2024, UNICEF published the first-ever global and regional estimates of sexual violence against children.⁴¹

Subsequent to this publication, the Commission's Annual Report Team consulted UNICEF's Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring to map any available data, disaggregated by the characteristics of the perpetrator, in the countries under review in the Commission's Annual Report. The aim of this mapping was to identify countries that might have data on the prevalence of sexual abuse against a minor perpetrated by a cleric. The results of this mapping revealed a notable scarcity of population-level data from household surveys that could be used to report on the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim/survivor. In the case of the countries covered in this Annual Report, survey data were available for Kenya and Namibia.

Results from this analysis were promising as they would have been compiled to provide a presentation in the Annual Report of the best available population-level data, relevant for comparative purposes to the Church's internal reporting. However, constraints related to study design, sample size, and access to datasets prevented the calculation of estimates with the required level of specificity and reliability. The Commission regrets the inability to incorporate this data in its second Annual Report and expresses the hope that relevant disaggregated data collection can be restored and expanded on a bilateral basis between the local governments and UNICEF. Access to this data would help augment the Commission's external data sources as an important means of data verification.

³⁶ CIC, c. 399, §1: "Every five years a diocesan bishop is bound to make a report to the Supreme Pontiff on the state of the diocese entrusted to him, according to the form and time determined by the Apostolic See".

³⁷ *Formula Relationis Quinquennalis, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis*, 1982.

³⁸ Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the "Ad Limina" Visit*, 1.2.2: "To make the work easier and to provide some editorial uniformity that would be helpful in subsequent study and dialogue, the Ordinary can make use of the special schema that has been prepared by the Congregation for Bishops", retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_19880629_visita-ad-limina_en.html.

³⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Circular letter to assist Episcopal Conferences in developing guidelines for dealing with cases of sexual abuses of minors perpetrated by clerics* (2011), retrieved here: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20110503_abuso-minori_en.html.

⁴⁰ Official database of the sessions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/SessionsList.aspx?Treaty=CRC.

⁴¹ UNICEF, *When Numbers Demand Action* (9 October 2024), retrieved at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/when-numbers-demand-action/>.

»»» Drafting, review, and finalisation of the text

Findings from the various data sources are consolidated by the Commission's Annual Report Team into a draft text in narrative form. This text is known as the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The Annual Report Team presents this draft text at the Commission's Fall Plenary Assembly of the year under review, requesting authorisation to proceed with the synodal phase.

After receiving the Commission's approval, the Annual Report Team coordinates the synodal phase consultations with the various episcopal conferences and religious congregations covered in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. During this phase, each conference and congregation receives the excerpt of the *Instrumentum Laboris* that pertains to them, along with a letter from the Commission's President inviting the conferences and congregations to a synodal exchange. This process enables a review of the text by the respective conference or congregation to verify its factual accuracy and to provide any additional information that they deem relevant for the Commission's further consideration. The Commission meets individually with any conferences and congregations that are interested in discussing the proposed text in a live and often in-person setting.

During this same phase, the Commission's President invites synodal feedback on the relevant excerpts of the *Instrumentum Laboris* from the respective Apostolic Nuncios in the local Churches. The Papal Representatives are invited to submit any relevant material that might help deepen the study presented in the drafted text. This solicitation from the Apostolic Nunciature also creates an additional data verification mechanism, given the local presence and knowledge of the Apostolic Nuncio.

At the conclusion of the synodal phase, the Annual Report Team integrates any changes deemed appropriate. The newly revised text is then presented to the Spring Plenary Assembly of the year following the reporting year, for the Commission's approval.

Upon the Commission's approval, the content of the text proceeds to a final series of consultations with the Commission's stakeholders in the Roman Curia. Consistent with the Conversional Justice framework, the Commission uses the Annual Report as a tool for dialogue with key partners in the Universal Church, to promote the ongoing conversion toward a culture of safeguarding.



CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA

Profile

Italy is a nation with 226 dioceses. It relies on the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (CEI) as its national episcopal conference, with 16 regional episcopal conferences also supporting the local Churches in the regions. The Commission met with seven of these regional conferences in the first quarter of 2024. On the basis of these meetings, we first present our broad findings with regard to Italy, and then provide more specific discussions with regard to some of the regions.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Commission expresses its gratitude to the bishops of Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Sardinia, Sicily, Emilia Romagna, and Tuscany for their visits and the frank discussions on their progress and challenges in safeguarding.
- » The Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire was answered by 81 dioceses out of the 226 belonging to the Conference.
- » There has been significant effort invested in the development of tools and comprehensive policies for prevention and protection over the years — taking into account both local needs and updates in Church law. The Commission acknowledges the Conference's dedicated work in the creation of a multilevel system (national, regional, diocesan, and interdiocesan) for coordination, training, and oversight that supports the local Churches by providing professional and well-trained staff.
- » The Conference reports 16 regional safeguarding services, 226 diocesan and interdiocesan safeguarding services, and 108 listening centres. The Commission notes with approval the publication in a single directory of the list of diocesan and interdiocesan safeguarding services.⁴² The Commission recognises that the listening centres are aimed at providing a pastoral and reporting service, within the prerogatives and law of the Church, without of course being able to substitute for the civil judiciary and law enforcement.
- » Significant progress has been made by the Servizio Nazionale per la Tutela dei Minori (National Service for Safeguarding, hereafter) in coordinating a multilevel safeguarding system. Notably, the Conference has developed a five-year work plan for the National Service for Safeguarding: *Progetto di Lavoro del Servizio Nazionale Tutela Minori e Adulti Vulnerabili per il quinquennio 2024–2029*.
- » In October 2024, a National Council was established, in accordance with the regulations of the National Service for Safeguarding.⁴³ Among its various responsibilities, the National Council facilitates an increasingly comprehensive and collaborative approach among the various safe-

⁴² Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), *Diocesan Services for the Protection of Minors on the Web*, retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/i-servizi-diocesani-per-la-tutela-dei-minori-sul-web/>.

⁴³ CEI, *Regolamento del servizio nazionale per la tutela dei minori*, retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/regolamento/>.

guarding networks within the Italian Church, including representatives from the Consulta Nazionale delle Aggregazioni Laicali (lay associations), Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori (men's religious conference), and Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia (women's religious conference). Within these bodies, there are study groups as set out in the aforementioned five-year work plan.

- » The First,⁴⁴ Second,⁴⁵ and Third⁴⁶ *Rilevazione sulle attività dei Servizi territoriali di tutela minori e adulti vulnerabili* (tracking of safeguarding activities), under the care of the Università del Sacro Cuore, have been published on the Conference website. The data covers 184 dioceses and all ecclesiastical regions.
- » The number of people trained in safeguarding in the Church in Italy is reported to have increased from 7,706 in 2020 to 22,755 in 2024.
- » The Conference demonstrates a dedicated and timely focus on people in conditions of vulnerability, including considerations related to an initial study on spiritual abuse⁴⁷ and a training course about love and sexuality among disabled persons: “Anch’io so voler bene: affettività e sessualità nella persona con disabilità”.⁴⁸
- » The Conference also promotes other positive training opportunities, particularly for the wider ecclesial community, especially in Catholic education⁴⁹ and Catholic health facilities.⁵⁰
- » The Conference sponsored a 29 May 2024 conference, “Abusi sui minori — Una lettura del contesto italiano”.⁵¹
- » The Conference produces a periodic newsletter with news, reports, and insights related to safeguarding.⁵²

⁴⁴ CEI, *Protect, Prevent, Train. First Report on the Territorial Network for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons* (17 November 2022), retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/proteggere-prevenire-formare-primo-report-sulla-rete-territoriale-per-la-tutela-dei-minori-e-delle-persone-vulnerabili/>.

⁴⁵ CEI, *Second Report on the Activities of the Territorial Services for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults* (21 November 2023), retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/seconda-rilevazione-sulle-attivita-dei-servizi-territoriali-di-tutela-minori-e-adulti-vulnerabili/>.

⁴⁶ CEI, *Third Report on the Activities of the Territorial Services for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults* (28 May 2025), retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/terza-rilevazione-sulle-attivita-territoriali-per-la-tutela-dei-minori-e-adulti-vulnerabili/>.

⁴⁷ CEI, *Spiritual Abuse: Elements of Recognition and Context* (4 April 2025), retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/labuso-spirituale-elementi-di-riconoscimento-e-di-contesto/>.

⁴⁸ CEI, Online Course “Anch’io so voler bene”: *Affettivity and Sexuality in Persons with Disabilities* (18 January 2024), retrieved at <https://pastoraledisabili.chiesacattolica.it/2024/01/18/corso-online-anchio-so-vo-ler-bene-affettivita-e-sessualita-nella-per-sona-con-disabilita/>.

⁴⁹ CEI, Webinar *IRC and the Protection of Minors: The Look That Protects* (8 March 2024), retrieved at <https://educazione.chiesacattolica.it/irc-e-tutela-minori-uno-sguardo-che-custodisce/>.

⁵⁰ CEI, Webinar *Fragile: Handle with Care* (7 March 2025), retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/fragile-maneggiare-con-cura/>.

⁵¹ Embassy of Italy to the Holy See, *Abuse of Minors – A Reading of the Italian Context* (24 April 2024), YouTube video retrieved at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1Qf1Obpn7A>.

⁵² CEI, National Service for the Protection of Minors, Newsletter archive, retrieved at https://nl.chiesacattolica.it/tutelaminori/archivio-newsletter/?_gl=1*19ckm0k*_ga*MTM2MDEzMzQwMy4xNzQ1NjA1NTg4*_ga_VMSXLL2MYL*MTc0NTYwNTU4Ny4xLjEuMTc0NTYwNzkwOS4wLjAuMA.

- » Since 2021, there has been a National Day of Prayer for victims/survivors of abuse.⁵³ This is an important practice of reparations.
- » Grants for cultural renewal and training in safeguarding for the entire ecclesial community are published on the National Service for Safeguarding’s website.⁵⁴
- » Cultural awareness-raising through a special series dedicated to the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.
- » The Conferenza Italiana dei Superiori Maggiori has subscribed to the national guidelines, although the Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia has not yet done so. Nonetheless, the Commission takes note of the goodwill expressed by the Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia in pursuing future collaboration.
- » The bishops’ commitment to be permanent observers at the Observatory for the Fight Against Pedophilia and Child Pornography established within the Department for Family Policies of the Ministry for Family, Birth, and Equal Opportunities, participating in the “Piano nazionale di prevenzione e contrasto dell’abuso e dello sfruttamento sessuale minorile”.⁵⁵
- » The Italian Church has undertaken a study of the phenomenon of intra-ecclesial abuse.
- » The Conference’s sharing of information with the Commission on the Pilot Study examining sexual abuse perpetrated by clerics in Italy, as reported or dealt with by diocesan bishops in the period 2001–2021. The research is entrusted to two independent research institutes: the *Istituto degli Innocenti* in Florence and the *Centro per la vittimologia e la sicurezza dell’Università Alma Mater di Bologna*. The Commission welcomes the fact that the study includes a quantitative and qualitative analytical phase on the intra-ecclesial phenomenology during the twenty-year period under consideration, while recognizing the need to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of abuse over the long term.

• Challenges

- » The Commission regrets not having met the regional delegations from Abruzzo-Molise, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Marche, Piedmont, Apulia, Triveneto, and Umbria.
- » The Commission regrets not having received answers to the PCPM safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire from all dioceses.
- » The Commission observes that although some local Churches have succeeded in creating pioneering solutions and even fruitful partnerships with civil society, great disparities remain across regions.

⁵³ CEI, *National Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors of Abuse*, retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/category/giornata-nazionale-di-preghiera/>.

⁵⁴ CEI, *Grants for Formation*, retrieved at <https://tutelaminori.chiesacattolica.it/category/sussidi-formativi/>.

⁵⁵ Italian Government, *National Plan for Preventing and Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation* (2022–2023), retrieved at <https://www.minori.gov.it/en/minori/piano-nazionale-contro-labuso-e-lo-sfruttamento-sessuale>.

- » The Commission notes the establishment of a comprehensive network of offices and structures in the dioceses for reporting and assistance, covering almost all dioceses. In its Third Report, the National Service for Safeguarding recorded the presence of teams in 144 out of 226 dioceses. However, there is a significant disparity in the personnel and resources allocated to several of these offices. The fact that several offices are only activated when needed and are not equipped with stable and sufficient staff and financial resources poses a serious implementation risk and may, in fact, complicate processes of accountability. This practice could have implications for the consistency, stability, and reliability of diocesan offices.
- » The Conference lacks a centralised office to receive reports and analyse in a timely and comparative manner the proper handling of cases in different regions to promote the uniform and effective development of these services that facilitate denunciations.
- » Seminarians, priests, postulants, novices, and religious come from all over the world to receive their education and formation in Italy, which poses the challenge of establishing effective background check procedures before integrating them into the various local communities. It poses the further challenge of promoting sound safeguarding formation that is also culturally sensitive given the differences among people arriving from abroad. Such training is essential for their well-being and preparedness, as well as for the well-being and safety of the children and vulnerable adults who interact with them.
- » The Commission notes substantial cultural resistance in Italy to addressing abuse. Cultural taboos can make it difficult for victims/survivors and their families to talk about their experiences and report them to the authorities.
- » The Commission recognises the value of continuing the study of specific cases — both past and present — in Italy through a robust and cumulative approach.
- » The Commission emphasises the importance of promoting and developing dialogue with victims/survivors, their families, and the associations that represent them, and expanding opportunities for a frank and constructive dialogue about their concerns, expectations, and experiences, especially regarding case management, reparations, and Church accountability. Doing so would reinforce the first important steps taken to facilitate a stable dialogue between the Italian Church and victims/survivors, as promoted in the five-year work plan for the National Service for Safeguarding.
- » The Commission recognises the sincere efforts that are directed toward safeguarding in the local Churches, as well as in numerous other pastoral and social settings, related to abuse prevention. Despite a solid commitment to safeguarding, however, there can often be inadequate public knowledge of what is being done by the Church. A sense of discouragement (safeguarding “fatigue”) may develop among the clergy regarding its efforts in safeguarding when the greater public persists in believing that little is being accomplished. It is important to develop a culture of safeguarding that is based on an integral approach and not merely on responding to individual cases in order to allow for the adoption of a long-term outlook amidst the clergy and broader society alike.

Recommendations

1. The ecclesiastical regions and dioceses that did not meet with the Commission and did not submit answers to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire should offer their input in the coming months, as an important part of the Commission’s study of the safeguarding ministry in the Italian Church. The Commission recommends a dedicated and proactive dialogue with these regions in the coming months to establish a working relationship with the Commission.
2. The Commission recommends that *all* regions make themselves available for meetings on the occasion of the bishops’ next *ad limina* visit.
3. At every level of the safeguarding system within the Italian Church, there should be continuous monitoring of the effective implementation of policies, as well as the effectiveness of victim/survivor reporting and accompaniment structures — along with an external and independent audit plan at the national level with shared standards to produce clear proposals to address the gaps identified by this review.
4. The strategic plan document, *Progetto di Lavoro per il Servizio Nazionale Tutela Minori e Adulti Vulnerabili: Quinquennio 2024–2029*, should be published on the national website.
5. Local structures for accompaniment and reporting should be permanently staffed with qualified personnel who have time to devote themselves fully to their tasks, without competing responsibilities. The Commission also recommends allocating adequate financial resources for the operational needs of these offices, rather than relying solely on *ad hoc* funding. If this is not immediately possible, the Commission recommends that ecclesiastical regions consider pooling human and material resources to create an initial uniform basis for prevention, response, and case management.
6. Expand formal collaborations with civil authorities in responding to denunciations, to ensure more effective review of allegations and greater transparency.
7. Continue the development of a joint dialogue among civil society, victim/survivor advocacy groups, law enforcement agencies, and universities, to promote training opportunities that will improve the local Church’s internal competencies, demonstrate its commitment to transparency, and enable it to be an even more visible advocate within society.
8. Continued participation by local Churches in Commission activities will be a solid platform to share good practices and learn about initiatives from other countries.
9. Local protocols should ensure that victims/survivors know that they can report to the civil authorities, and that the local Church is willing to help facilitate this reporting. It is good practice to include a note confirming this communication in the complaint documentation.
10. Develop updated guidelines that include provisions on power dynamics and abuse of power, in order to help create an environment of trust and mutual respect between pastoral agents and

minors/vulnerable adults. The Commission further recommends the implementation of training programmes that address power dynamics and how to prevent the abuse of power.

11. Maintain and further develop close cooperation among bishops and major superiors, both men and women.
12. Ensure careful supervision of priests, religious men and women, seminarians, and future consecrated men and women who come to study and exercise pastoral ministry in Italy. The draw of Rome in the Universal Church leads many people to carry out their studies and first works in Italy. Although they do not all fall under the supervision of the Italian Church, the Commission advises close attention to strengthening safeguarding policies for these people. The Commission also recommends attentiveness to the risks associated with potential abuse suffered during these periods of exposure to new and often unfamiliar power dynamics and cultural contexts.
13. Local Churches should assist all lay movements/associations, with due regard for their respective responsibilities, in adapting to the standards of the national safeguarding guidelines. Such conversations could facilitate regular meetings between the bishops and the leaders of the lay movements/associations. This could also enable collaboration and the sharing of resources for safeguarding formation and structures.
14. Given the significant presence of secular institutes in Italy, the bishops should involve the leadership of such institutes in their discussions with the Commission in order to facilitate meaningful collaboration on safeguarding.
15. The bishops should conduct a reflection or retreat with their clergy on the foundations of safeguarding in Gospel values. The Commission encourages this approach to address any sense of disillusionment or discouragement that can result from perceiving safeguarding merely as the management of individual crises.

• Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Italy (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of Italy, through the *Autorità garante per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza*, reported, "Among the commitments of the National Observatory for the fight against child paedophilia and pornography, there is the establishment and the maintenance of a Data Bank which collects, through the contributions provided by the administrations concerned, the information necessary to monitor the phenomenon of abuse and sexual exploitation of minors, child pornography, and of the associated prevention and repression actions".⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Italian Authority for Children and Adolescents, *Opinion on the Fifth and Sixth Government Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* (20 July 2012), p. 14, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FADR%2FITA%2F28109&Lang=en.

- » The Government of Italy reported, "Women suffer sexual violence even during their childhood: 10.6% stated that they suffered some type of sexual violence before they were 16. Specifically, in 10% of cases, the woman was sexually touched against her will, in 3% she was compelled to touch intimate parts of the abuser and in 0.8% she suffered more serious forms, such as rape. The most frequent perpetrators of such acts is someone known to the victim/survivor (almost 80%), especially relatives and family members (19.5%), family friends (11.4%), schoolmates (8%), friends (7.4%), and acquaintances (23.8%). Strangers represent 20.2% (they were 24.6% in 2006)".⁵⁷
- » ECPAT International and ECPAT Italy (civil society organisations) reported, "An analysis of the phone calls received by the two main Italian telephone helplines for children shows that sexting-related cases are rapidly increasing. In 2016, 7.1% of the phone calls related to sexual abuse and exploitation received by the operators of the helpline 114 *Emergenza Infanzia* reported cases of sexting compared to 3.7% in 2013; whilst requests for help for sexting episodes represented 21.6% of the phone calls received by the helpline 1.96.96".⁵⁸
- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) noted concern especially in Italy, given the "large number of institutions under the aegis of the Catholic Church",⁵⁹ about the potential underreporting of cases of clerical sexual abuse.⁶⁰
- » The National Secular Society further noted, "Example 2 (Appendix) comes from an Italian organisation seeking to bring paedophile Catholic priests in Italy to justice. It shows 120 definitive convictions against child abusers among the clergy from the last 10 years...."⁶¹
- » The National Secular Society cited a Catholic News Service article, "No mandatory reporting in Italian norms for handling abuse allegations", in which the Italian bishops asserted that "if there appears to be an 'immediate danger' of a church employee sexually abusing a child again, the police must be informed".⁶²
- » The Italian NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (civil society organisation) noted, "As regards sexual abuse, it is necessary to highlight the importance of primary prevention, which involves, above all, affective sexual education".⁶³

⁵⁷ Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers Department for Equal Opportunity, *Violence Against Women In And Outside the Family Year 2014* (5 June 2015), p. 5, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FAI-Treaties%2FACR%2FITA%2F8029&Lang=en.

⁵⁸ ECPAT Italy and ECPAT International, *Sexual Exploitation of Children in Italy* (1 March 2018), par. 16, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FNGO%2FITA%2F31107&Lang=en.

⁵⁹ National Secular Society, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Alternative Report on Italy* (March 2018), par. 6, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FNGO%2FITA%2F31110&Lang=en.

⁶⁰ Ibid., par. 4, 10, 13.

⁶¹ Ibid., par. 12.

⁶² Ibid., Appendix B.

⁶³ Italian NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC Group), *The Rights of Children and Adolescents in Italy, 3rd Supplementary Report* (February 2018), Chapter IV.2, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FNGO%2FITA%2F33354&Lang=en.

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted, “While welcoming the national plan for the prevention of and fight against abuse and sexual exploitation of children for 2015–2017 and the resumption of activities of the Observatory to Counter Paedophilia and Child Pornography, the Committee is concerned about the numerous cases of children who have been sexually abused by religious personnel of the Catholic church in the State party and the low number of investigations and criminal prosecutions”.⁶⁴



EMILIA ROMAGNA

• Profile

Emilia Romagna is an Italian region with 15 dioceses that are members of the Episcopal Conference of Emilia Romagna and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 29 February 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, attended the in-person *ad limina* visit. The Commission welcomes His Eminence's engagement on the important issue of safeguarding in the Italian Church.
- » Mons. Lorenzo Ghizzoni, then-President of the National Service for the Protection of Minors of the Italian Bishops' Conference, also attended the *ad limina* visit. The Commission welcomes His Excellency's leadership in the important safeguarding ministry of the Italian Church.
- » The Episcopal Conference of Emilia Romagna demonstrates observation of and adherence to the national guidelines of the Italian Bishops' Conference.
- » In 2018, the bishops of the region established safeguarding teams in each diocese. Since 2019, every diocese in the region reports to have an organisational chart representing these teams.
- » A good practice in the Archdiocese of Modena has been to set up an interdiocesan account to guarantee the financing of safeguarding in the diocesan territories of the Metropolitan See, including Modena, Carpi, Mirandola, and Vignola.
- » In the Diocese of Imola, the diocesan listening centre has produced videos on YouTube to sensitise and disseminate information on victim/survivor accompaniment services.
- » Every diocese in the region reports to have organised an event, a moment of prayer, or other initiatives to raise awareness around safeguarding.

- » Despite the opening of the listening centres, the bishops of the region report that most denunciations are still made directly to the ordinary. From there, the ordinary involves the listening centre for follow-up. The listening centres currently include the involvement of lay experts and are physically located outside the diocesan curia offices.
- » An agreement in 2018–2019 established a one-year academic course in which training was offered to persons from the region who were chosen to work in the field of child protection.
- » The Diocese of Rimini invited the Commission to accompany its safeguarding work with an in-depth audit of prevention and management initiatives in the ecclesiastical circumscription.
- » The region's bishops provided comprehensive answers to the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.

• Challenges

- » There is a diocesan budget dedicated to the implementation of the safeguarding guidelines in most but not all dioceses.
- » There is a risk of limited oversight and accountability among the lay associations/movements in the region, as well as a lack of cooperation on safeguarding initiatives between the bishops and religious in the region.
- » Most cases in the region are reportedly not brought to civil court by the victims/survivors or their families.
- » The bishops expressed valid concerns about involvement and effective collaboration with the media.
- » The bishops raised an important and pressing moral question on the part of the episcopate, namely whether a bishop can and should report a case to the civil authorities, even if the victim/survivor (or family members) do not wish to report outside Church structures.
- » The bishops expressed concern that some judicial processes in civil courts move very slowly. The bishops believe that this slowness may be part of the reason why some victims/survivors do not want their cases to be reported to the civil authorities.
- » The Commission notes some difficulties among bishops in identifying the dicastery with the right competency when a denunciation is made involving members of religious congregations.
- » The Commission notes the challenges associated with COVID-19, which disrupted the region's plans for regular training courses offered to those working in the listening centres.
- » The Commission notes that diocesan safeguarding teams are not always involved in the process of vetting candidates for Holy Orders, nor do they contribute to seminary formation.

⁶⁴ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Italy* (28 February 2019), par. 21, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2F5%2FITA%2FCO%2F5-6&Lang=en.

Recommendations

1. Each of the ecclesiastical provinces should adopt the interdiocesan resource-sharing approach promoted by the Archdiocese of Modena. The Commission highlights this interdiocesan resource sharing to ensure sufficient resources to effectively implement the guidelines in the region.
2. The region should consider and reflect on how its management of perpetrators can be improved.
3. An integral approach to safeguarding should be adopted, requiring accountability in all areas of the local Church — including Catholic schools and the employees who serve in them.
4. There should be a stronger and closer relationship between the bishops and lay associations/movements to promote safeguarding oversight and accountability.
5. Further development of a communication strategy and protocols will help to ensure effective and culturally appropriate public communications on abuse.
6. A joint study with the bishops on the issue of reporting to the civil authorities should be conducted in a multidisciplinary manner, including contributions from legal and psychological experts. Such a study could provide personalised guidance on how to adopt a trauma-informed approach, in full compliance with Church law and Italian civil law.
7. Clear protocols for listening centres should be developed and published so that victims/survivors recognise the Church's commitment to transparency and have clear expectations when accessing the services offered.
8. Diocesan safeguarding teams should be directly involved in the selection process of candidates for Holy Orders.



TUSCANY

• Profile

Tuscany is an Italian region with 18 dioceses that are members of the Tuscan Bishops' Conference and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 7 March 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » There is a Regional Commission for Child Protection in Tuscany.

- » The two dioceses that responded to the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire have designated contact persons for safeguarding.
- » The Archdiocese of Florence allocates dedicated funds for safeguarding in the archdiocesan budget.
- » The bishops of the region follow the guidelines of the Italian Bishops' Conference for the vetting of foreign priests arriving to serve in their dioceses. The Commission notes the practice of establishing an agreement between the sending bishop and the receiving bishop, which provides for the exchange of certain standard documents that enable background checks to be conducted.
- » There is a direct commitment by and closeness of some bishops in the region to victims/survivors and their families. The Commission notes that this commitment was received with great appreciation by the community of victims/survivors.
- » The region's bishops shared a positive reflection on a vigil held for victims/survivors of abuse in the wake of the 2007 scandal. The Commission notes that the preparations for this vigil were not easy, but that through meetings and contact with victims/survivors, a meaningful platform of openness and dialogue was created.
- » A good practice in a diocese has created the possibility for perpetrators to be placed in a community where they participate in a psychotherapeutic process and a process of recognition of guilt.
- » The Archdiocese of Florence's cooperation with the civil Prefecture in responding to denunciations is another good practice.
- » There is a compulsory course on child protection in the Faculty of Theology in the region.
- » A diocese has an ongoing formation for clergy that has been embraced and well received.
- » A diocese has organised training courses for parents and catechists to recognise the early warning signs of abuse.
- » One of the region's bishops has indicated that the Italian Bishops' Conference is developing protocols for robust safeguarding formation.
- » The archdiocesan safeguarding team is involved in the process of selecting candidates for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Florence.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes that only three dioceses responded to the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.

- » There is a significant lack of data on the extent of abuse, which may deter progress in safeguarding efforts.
- » The region's bishops expressed concerns about current cases of abuse of power and inappropriate relationships, despite very few reported cases of sexual abuse.
- » The region's bishops also expressed concern about the reinstatement of a priest who committed a crime but was not removed from the clerical state; the Commission notes the need for a more standardised approach to dealing properly with perpetrators.
- » The region's bishops raised the issue of the challenges to effective and timely civil and canonical justice processes.
- » There is a clear need to expand safeguarding training for clergy and other pastoral workers in the region.
- » The Commission notes that family cultural taboos prevent families from reporting cases to the civil authorities, especially if the perpetrator is a family member.
- » The Commission notes the difficulties expressed by the bishops in establishing effective relations with the media.
- » The significantly low number of reported cases in the region could indicate that reporting structures are not fully accessible to victims/survivors.
- » A diocesan safeguarding team is still being set up in the Archdiocese of Arezzo.
- » There is no established audit mechanism at the regional level.

Recommendations

1. The remaining dioceses that have not yet responded to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire should do so promptly.
2. The region's bishops should continue in their efforts to promote safeguarding as an intrinsic and valuable part of the local Church's ministry.
3. The region's bishops should involve the Commission for further awareness-raising and discussion on the extent of the phenomenon of abuse and its impact on victims/survivors.
4. The Regional Commission for Child Protection in Tuscany should publish details of its statutes, membership, and budget.
5. The Commission recommends robust ongoing training for clergy in the various dioceses, along with training in all dioceses in the region for parents and catechists to recognise the early warning signs of abuse.

6. Training courses for minors in Catholic schools should also be implemented so that they have adequate cognitive tools to identify risky behaviour, whether it occurs at school, in parishes, or in families. The Commission believes that this will further reassure children, so that they can feel confident in reporting any noncompliant behaviour suffered by them or their classmates.
7. In the context of developing a protocol to deal appropriately with perpetrators, the primary purpose must be safeguarding.
8. The region's bishops should not interpret the low number of reported cases as a sign that there is no abuse. Rather, the region's bishops should further develop their reporting structures to make them more public and accessible to victims/survivors who wish to report their cases.
9. The Commission recommends the rigorous collection and monitoring of data on cases of abuse.
10. The Commission recommends a meeting between its Regional Group Europe and the Regional Commission for Child Protection to explore the development of an audit mechanism.



SARDINIA

• Profile

Sardinia is an Italian region with ten dioceses that are members of the Bishops' Conference of Sardinia and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 9 April 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » During the *ad limina* visit, the bishops expressed their commitment to “welcome, listen, and accompany” victims/survivors, and reflected on the need to promote an understanding of safeguarding within the Church's broader mission of serving the poor, that is, as part of the Church's ordinary pastoral ministry.
- » There are sincere efforts directed toward safeguarding in the local Churches, as well as in numerous other pastoral and social settings related to abuse prevention.
- » There are safeguarding teams and listening centres in the region's dioceses.

- » An extensive support service for victims/survivors in the Diocese of Tempio Ampurias goes far beyond simply receiving complaints. The Diocese of Tempio Ampurias participates in the work of a centre called “Dimmi ti ascolto” (“Tell me, I’m listening”), which is a collaboration among the public prosecutor’s office, the court, the police, and social services in the area. It deals with abuse in society, particularly sexual abuse. The Commission notes that this victim/survivor support service is a good practice that should be replicated across the Conference. It presents an important model of collaboration with civil bodies to handle and receive Church and extra-ecclesial denunciations alike.
- » An experimental collaboration with the civil authorities is in operation in the Diocese of Sassari for case management, although there is no formal agreement.
- » There is an annual safeguarding course for clergy in the Diocese of Sassari and two online training courses for pastoral agents each year.
- » The bishops are committed to providing training on safeguarding to the entire ecclesial community.
- » A 2024 safeguarding conference of the Archdiocese of Cagliari focused on online abuse.
- » A training event on safeguarding was held in the Archdiocese of Cagliari in cooperation with the public prosecutor’s office and child protection professionals from civil society.
- » A pilot audit programme in the region was initiated in cooperation with university partners.

• Challenges

- » There is no stable budget dedicated to safeguarding in the region’s dioceses, but rather each diocese activates its own resources to be allocated as needed.
- » There is a need for reflection among the bishops on their moral responsibility for reporting to the civil authorities. The fact that in Italy there is no obligation to report, and that the national guidelines do not provide for such a requirement (except in the case of an enduring and imminent danger), highlights the need for defining these moral obligations more precisely.
- » The Commission notes concerns about cultural reluctance to report cases of abuse.
- » The region’s bishops expressed concerns about the spread and dangers of pornography.
- » The region’s bishops also expressed concerns about the proper handling of offenders.
- » The Commission notes the challenges faced by some of the smaller dioceses in providing financial resources for safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes a need for more robust safeguarding training.
- » The Commission is concerned about the lack of data collected by the listening centres.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends the development of the bishops’ concrete responsibility for safeguarding in the regional policies and guidelines.
2. The Commission recommends conducting a regional audit focusing on 1) the amount of human and financial resources allocated to local safeguarding teams, 2) the local clergy’s perception of safeguarding, and 3) the effectiveness of reporting systems with regard to the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2.
3. The Commission invites the Bishop of Tempio Ampurias to meet with the Regional Group Europe to discuss the unique experience represented by the Diocese’s victim/survivor accompaniment services, in order to explore existing good practices that could be shared with the Italian Episcopal Conference and other episcopal conferences around the world.
4. All lay movements/associations in the local Church should be encouraged to adhere to standards corresponding to the national safeguarding guidelines, to facilitate cooperation with the dioceses.
5. The Commission recommends inter-diocesan collaborations, especially between small dioceses, to mitigate the limited financial resources for safeguarding.
6. The Commission recommends the development of sound safeguarding formation to provide initial and ongoing training for all those working in the local Church. The Commission encourages the creation of inclusive training structures to help build a true culture of safeguarding.
7. The Commission recommends the rigorous collection and monitoring of data on cases of abuse.
8. The Commission recommends the further development of the pilot audit programme initiated in cooperation with university partners. The Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.



• Profile

Lazio is an Italian region with 21 dioceses that are members of the Episcopal Conference of Lazio and the Italian Episcopal Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 20 March 2024.

LAZIO

• Safeguarding overview

- » Five dioceses in the region responded to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
- » A new guideline document was published by the region in 2024.
- » The region's bishops are committed to the delicate but important responsibility of accompanying victims/survivors, including facilitating ways to share their stories with Church authorities. The Commission recognises the important commitment demonstrated by the region's bishops who have listened directly to the testimonies of victims/survivors.
- » A synodal process took place in several dioceses in the region to develop a diocesan *vademecum* on safeguarding. The *vademecum* of the Diocese of Rome is called "A noi state a cuore" ("You Are Important to Us"). This synodal process is a good practice and consistent with one of the Commission's main observations in the pilot Annual Report regarding the need to deepen Church teachings on safeguarding through input to the magisterium and to synodal processes on the subject.
- » The region's bishops expressed support for a formal collaboration with the civil authorities, which they believe should be negotiated by the Italian Bishops' Conference at the national level.
- » Specific protocols are in place for listening centres in some dioceses.
- » The diocesan listening centre in the Diocese of Rome will soon be moved from the Vicariate building to allow victims/survivors to access a non-ecclesial space for reporting. This is a good practice.
- » The Military Ordinariate offers a two-day course on safeguarding annually.
- » In the Diocese of Rome, under the Office of Education, all teachers in the Diocese are offered a safeguarding course.
- » The Rector of the Major Seminary of Rome expressed a wish to develop a *vademecum* for seminarians.

• Challenges

- » Most dioceses stated that they do not have a dedicated budget for safeguarding, and currently activate funds as needed.
- » The bishops expressed concern that safeguarding policies and structures must become even more a part of the local Church's own culture.
- » The Commission notes the need for more robust training to effectively implement the guidelines on the ground.
- » The bishops expressed concern that victims/survivors often do not have a sufficient presence in canonical procedures, especially extrajudicial ones.
- » The bishops expressed concern that victims/survivors sometimes do not want to have a direct relationship with the civil authorities.
- » There is an ongoing need to clarify who exercises supervision over the lay movements/associations operating in the dioceses.

- » The Commission notes the concerns and questions of the Diocese of Rome on how to disseminate the diocesan *vademecum* on safeguarding, considering the cultural taboos that exist around abuse.
- » Some dioceses in the region do not have a designated person to receive complaints. This seems to be inconsistent with the national guidelines of the Italian Bishops' Conference and out of compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2.
- » The Commission notes concern about possible conflicts of interest in some canonical investigations, especially when religious are involved.
- » The Commission notes a large influx of seminarians and priests arriving for training in the region from all over the world, yet minimum standards for safeguarding training are lacking upon their arrival. This issue is amplified by the considerable diversity of their backgrounds and previous training.
- » The Commission notes a previous training opportunity for catechists, but only for one hour, which the bishops recognise is insufficient to have an impact.
- » The Commission notes that in at least one diocese, the diocesan safeguarding office is not involved in the selection of candidates for the priesthood.

Recommendations

1. The dioceses that have not yet responded to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire should do so promptly.
2. Interdiocesan resources — both financial and human — should be pooled to help mitigate budget constraints with regard to safeguarding activities.
3. The region should conduct a review of the implementation and effectiveness of the guidelines and listening centres in the region and share the evaluation criteria for this review.
4. The Commission recommends accompanying clergy to reflect on the gospel values associated with safeguarding.
5. The region's bishops should work with the Commission to jointly promote victims'/survivors' right to information during canonical trials.
6. The region's bishops should ensure that the voices of victims/survivors are heard as part of the preliminary investigation.
7. Local Churches should cooperate with lay movements/associations so that they conform to standards corresponding to national guidelines on safeguarding.
8. The bishops of the region should engage with the Regional Group Europe to discuss good practices to address cultural taboos.
9. The Commission recommends preliminary checks to avoid conflicts of interest prior to the appointment of canonical investigators.

10. A *vademecum* for seminarians should include not only rules on abuse, but also the promotion of appropriate behaviour and culture in seminaries. The Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.
11. The Commission recommends, especially in the Diocese of Rome, the creation of a more systematic structure to offer training on safeguarding to seminarians and priests who come to Rome for study. This structure could make use of the Pontifical Universities.
12. The diocesan safeguarding offices in the region should be involved in the process of selecting candidates for the priesthood.
13. The Commission recommends — given the unique nature of Lazio, which, thanks to Rome, brings together seminarians, priests, and religious men and women from all over the world — a targeted audit of the safeguarding procedures.



LOMBARDY

• Profile

Lombardy is an Italian region with ten dioceses that are members of the Lombardy Bishops' Conference and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 25 January 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » There is a stable budget for safeguarding in two of the region's dioceses.
- » There are specific guidelines for the diocesan safeguarding offices in two of the region's dioceses.
- » The Dioceses of Bergamo and Mantua have a unique and good practice in their publication of diocesan circular letters titled: "Good practices for the prevention and protection of minors in the parish".
- » One diocese has a professional psychological assessment for candidates to Holy Orders.
- » The Diocese of Crema has published a safeguarding Decalogue of Conduct for parishes and educators on the diocesan website, which is a good practice.
- » Some dioceses have solid training in safeguarding for both clergy and non-clergy pastoral workers.

- » There are efforts to increase safeguarding awareness with lay movements/associations in the Diocese of Mantua.
- » Expert teams for case management are present in some dioceses in the region.
- » The Diocese of Brescia has an online reporting system for cases of abuse.
- » The Archdiocese of Milan has a document titled "Pathways and perspectives of formation and prevention for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons in the archdiocesan seminary of Milan".
- » There are useful initial and ongoing training opportunities in safeguarding offered in most of the dioceses in the region.
- » The Dioceses of Bergamo and Mantua have their own safeguarding audit teams. The Commission notes that these local audit teams are unique in the Italian Church.

• Challenges

- » The Commission emphasises that it would be very useful to develop specific safeguarding guidelines and protocols for all diocesan safeguarding offices.
- » Responsible and transparent management of diocesan safeguarding offices requires a commitment to specific procedures that are made known to the public, especially to victims/survivors and their communities.
- » The region's bishops expressed urgent questions and doubts on the definition of vulnerability, especially following the increase in cases involving vulnerable adults.
- » The region's bishops recognize that access to diocesan safeguarding offices could still be improved.
- » The Commission notes the joint reflection of the region's bishops on the opportunities offered by expanding the resources dedicated to the appropriate accompaniment of victims/survivors.
- » There is only limited cooperation from the religious in the region.
- » There are no formal cooperation agreements with the civil authorities in the region.
- » There is only limited cooperation from lay movements/associations in the region and even resistance from some of them to oversight.
- » It would be useful to have telephone numbers available for victims/survivors to access diocesan reporting services.
- » There is a need for further reflection by the region's bishops on how to properly deal with perpetrators.
- » Although the safeguarding audit teams of the Dioceses of Bergamo and Mantua are a positive development, they are still only internal audit measures. The Commission notes its concern that these internal audits may not be sufficient to adequately promote continuous quality improvement.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recognises the safeguarding challenges in relation to people with disabilities and recommends the development of updated guidelines that include their needs. This may include training educators on how to improve safeguarding for these people.
2. The Commission recommends the development of an audit mechanism that periodically evaluates the effectiveness of safeguarding practices. This could include collecting feedback from children, families, and educators. The Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany such an initiative.
3. Continuous training courses should be offered for educators and pastoral workers, covering topics such as the latest child protection norms, international good practice, and abuse prevention techniques.
4. The Commission recommends cooperation with external organisations and civil authorities, such as social welfare centres and law enforcement agencies, to share information and improve the services offered to victims/survivors.
5. The Commission invites the Bishop of Mantua to meet with the Regional Group Europe to further discuss the circular letter, "Good practices for the prevention and protection of minors in the parish". The Commission would like to explore the possibility of sharing the specifics of this document with other dioceses, given its particularly strong provisions.
6. The creation and adoption of a referral network in the region would allow dioceses to refer victims/survivors to accompaniment services offered by external organisations. The Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.
7. A strong collaboration between bishops and religious on safeguarding initiatives would be valuable in promoting a One Church approach to safeguarding.
8. The Commission recommends updating the documents on the formation of seminarians to include a section on psychological and social dynamics, as well as a system for monitoring and evaluating the practices implemented. In addition, the Commission recommends the inclusion of considerations regarding local legislation, along with practical examples to improve the document's applicability and usefulness for Church communities.
9. The Commission recommends improving audit measures to include external audits conducted by independent, professionally accredited auditors to ensure impartial and comprehensive assessments. The scope of these audits could also be broadened to include not only the financial and administrative aspects of the safeguarding apparatus, but also quality improvement initiatives, strategic planning, and compliance with safeguarding policies. These improvements could also require the allocation of additional resources to the audit team to ensure the capacity to conduct frequent and thorough audits. Audit reports should be made public in order to communicate the results transparently to all.

LIGURIA



• Profile

Liguria is an Italian region with seven dioceses that are members of the Ligurian Episcopal Conference and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 15 February 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » There are dedicated budgets for safeguarding in some dioceses in the region.
- » There are diocesan safeguarding teams in each of the dioceses in the region.
- » The Diocese of Chiavari is drafting a code of conduct.
- » The diocesan safeguarding team in one diocese has met with all diocesan employees.
- » One diocese has a pastoral counselling institute, which is introducing a session on child protection.
- » There is information available on the diocesan websites about the respective diocesan safeguarding teams.
- » The Commission notes collaboration and awareness-raising in some dioceses with lay movements/associations.
- » There are collaborations in some dioceses with the religious.
- » The Diocese of Savona participated in several initiatives organised by local law enforcement.
- » There are initial and ongoing training courses for clergy in some dioceses in the region.
- » A training session in one diocese focused on raising awareness of *Vos estis lux mundi* amongst the clergy.
- » The region's bishops continue to reflect on the appropriateness of a regional or diocesan structure as the best model for victim/survivor accompaniment services.
- » Some dioceses expressed interest in an audit by the Commission.

• Challenges

- » The diocesan listening centres have not collected any reports to date. The Commission is concerned about the accessibility of the respective diocesan safeguarding teams and listening centres.
- » The Commission notes the complexity of the relationship between the local Churches and the victim/survivor associations and advocacy groups active in the area.

- » Complexities have been reported about the cooperation between bishops and religious in matters of safeguarding.
- » The lack of structured cooperation or formal agreements between the bishops and the civil authorities is concerning.
- » The Commission notes its concern about the bishops' difficulties with certain lay movements/associations in matters of safeguarding.
- » The dioceses in the region are rather small and there is concern as to how to exercise preventive measures in a fair manner in this cultural context — while an investigation is ongoing — without giving the impression that it is tantamount to a final judgement.

Recommendations

1. A stable budget dedicated to safeguarding should be implemented in each of the region's dioceses.
2. A code of conduct should be developed and disseminated in each of the region's dioceses.
3. Pursuing better cooperation with victim/survivor associations and advocacy groups.
4. There should be closer cooperation on safeguarding between bishops and lay movements/associations.
5. There should be closer cooperation on safeguarding initiatives between bishops and religious.
6. An educational curriculum on safeguarding should be further developed to help form a comprehensive understanding of healthy affective behaviour.
7. Proactive and transparent communication are the key to addressing the cultural challenges of small dioceses, with communicating the procedures and decisions taken in specific cases.
8. The bishops should recognize their central role in case management and ensure the implementation of appropriate standards.

• Profile

Sicily is an Italian region with 18 dioceses that are members of the Episcopal Conference of Sicily and the Italian Bishops' Conference. The Commission met with the delegation on 3 May 2024.

SICILIA

• Safeguarding overview

- » A good dialogue has developed over the years between the region's bishops and the Commission, and in particular with the Archbishop of Palermo.
- » The bishops of the region who were present at the *ad limina* visit confirmed that they have a diocesan safeguarding team and have set up listening centres in their dioceses.
- » There is formation of lay pastoral workers in the Diocese of Monreale.
- » There is a good collaboration with lay movements/associations in the Diocese of Monreale.
- » There is good collaboration with the religious in the Diocese of Trapani.
- » There are some training courses for clergy in the region.
- » The Diocese of Trapani and the civil authorities to have reportedly agreed to collaborate on safeguarding issues.

• Challenges

- » The Commission regrets that it met with only three bishops from the region when the delegation came to Rome on their *ad limina* visit.
- » There is a need to further develop protocols to govern diocesan listening centres.
- » There is significant variation in the levels of development of prevention and case management structures and resources in the region, which would benefit from deeper collaboration between dioceses.
- » The Commission notes the need to improve the various relationships among the bishops, victims/survivors, their associations, and the local media.
- » The region's bishops expressed concern about the need to develop new ways to promote safeguarding efforts in order to achieve a publicly recognisable degree of trust.
- » The bishops' expressed concern about the cultural tendency to blame victims/survivors or question their credibility, which may discourage people from coming forward and seeking help.
- » The Commission notes other cultural and social norms that may also create resistance to reporting and addressing safeguarding issues, including a reluctance to acknowledge or discuss issues of abuse or exploitation.
- » There is limited collaboration on safeguarding between bishops and religious.
- » Safeguarding protocols in the region's seminaries should be expanded to include appropriate training, codes of conduct, reporting structures, and verification systems within the seminaries themselves. Safeguarding liaisons should also be present in each facility.
- » There is a lack of formal cooperation agreements throughout the region between the bishops and civil authorities, despite some specific joint study activities in some dioceses.
- » The Commission notes the lack of a review mechanism in place as part of the local Church's safeguarding apparatus.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends the development of specific protocols for the management of diocesan listening centres. The Commission also recommends that these protocols be made publicly available as a commitment to accountability and transparency.
2. The Commission recommends that the region's bishops develop a dialogue with victim/survivor associations, taking into account the opportunity that such a dialogue would offer in terms of healing, ascertaining the truth, and promoting transparency. This dialogue should be sought in all circumstances, but it is even more useful when there are cases that have shaken public confidence in the work of the Church.
3. Codes of conduct should be adopted in each of the dioceses, to delineate the standards of conduct acceptable to clergy and all pastoral workers. These codes of conduct should also be present in seminaries and formation houses.
4. The Commission recommends a strong collaboration between bishops and religious in matters of safeguarding, to promote a One Church approach.
5. The Commission recommends robust initial and ongoing safeguarding training for all those working in the local Church.
6. A comprehensive audit mechanism should be developed at the regional level. This tool should evaluate all Church safeguarding standards, including compliance with the policies by Church leadership, as well as possible indicators of neglect. The Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.
7. Bishops who have developed agreements with civil authorities are invited to share them with the Commission so that they can be studied as good practice.
8. The region's bishops should continue to reflect on how to build a stronger and more trusting relationship with victims/survivors, their advocacy groups, and the media. This can start with the public and transparent presentation of procedures, credible audit mechanisms, and dedicated codes of conduct.



EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GABON

Profile

Gabon is a nation with six dioceses. It relies on the Conférence Épiscopale du Gabon as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 4 March 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Conference is open to the Commission's accompaniment and support in follow-up to the *ad limina* visit.
- » The Conference is interested in the Memorare Initiative.
- » The Conference gave a presentation on their national safeguarding guidelines during their in-person *ad limina* visit.
- » The bishops expressed their interest in promoting a holistic approach to safeguarding, insisting upon its evangelical nature and the covariance of different forms of abuse.
- » The bishops similarly expressed interest in promoting effective education across the local Church, and especially in their Catholic schools and in families.
- » The bishops have held consultations with the Apostolic Nuncio regarding the proper procedure to follow for specific cases.

• Challenges

- » There is inadequate data on the prevalence of abuse in the local Church, which has perhaps led to a reluctance to consider the phenomenon of abuse as a priority issue in the local Church.
- » There is also a lack of safeguarding knowledge among Church leadership, and relatedly a lack of safeguarding professionals in the local Church.
- » The existence of strong anti-gay taboos often creates a barrier for victims/survivors in reporting same-sex abuse.
- » In general, there is significant reluctance on the part of victims/survivors to report their cases to the civil authorities; similarly, community members are generally unwilling to speak out about a case of abuse or cooperate with investigations and canonical processes.
- » There is a perception among the local Church's leadership that safeguarding poses a potential threat to the relationship between children and the clergy.
- » The Commission is concerned about a lack of collaboration between the bishops and religious.
- » The Commission notes the bishops' significant concern about rates of abuse in the family context.
- » The Commission notes the need for more training on recognising signs of abuse and listening to victims/survivors, and the lack of accessible and safe reporting mechanisms for victims/survivors in general.

- » The bishops expressed concern about how to manage alleged perpetrators during the investigation and canonical processes.
- » There is no provision for audit mechanisms built into the Conference's safeguarding apparatus.
- » The Commission notes the bishops' lack of response to the safeguarding quinquennial questionnaire presented during the *ad limina* visit.
- » The Commission notes significant concern around the lack of functioning ecclesiastical tribunals in the local Church.
- » An ongoing review of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines is now being followed by the Commission, given its competencies prescribed in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*. This review will also enable the important alignment of the Conference's guidelines with the Conference of Major Superiors of Gabon (COSMAG). The Commission notes this pending review with particular attention, because a finalisation of the Conference's guidelines could help promote meaningful cooperation between the bishops and religious, consistent with a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes concern with cases reported in the local media of abuse perpetrated primarily by parents and so-called "men of God", as described in a 13 December 2024 article by L'Union entitled "*Viols sur mineurs: la cote d'alerte*".

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Gabon, to promote a culturally responsive and holistic safeguarding regime in the local Church. The Memorare Initiative should adopt a One Church approach, to facilitate a collaboration between the bishops and religious on safeguarding. The Memorare Initiative should urgently address the need for an accessible reporting mechanism, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*, Article 2. The Memorare Initiative could also contribute to the edification of ecclesiastical tribunals in the local Church.
2. The Commission recommends the joint consideration of an in-country visit from a Commission delegation to Gabon, to further accompany the local Church.
3. The Commission notes that in 2022, the Conference submitted its updated safeguarding guidelines to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, after integrating the suggestions received by that curial institution. A final review is still pending, which is now the competency of the Commission, which is conducting a review according to the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission encourages the Conference's close dialogue as this process is undertaken.
4. The Conference should explore the adoption of robust affective behavioural education in the Catholic schools across the local Church.
5. The Conference should prioritise training for the clergy on healthy relationships.
6. The Commission recommends significant investment in safeguarding formation and outreach to the laity and families for psychosocial support, human sexuality education, and affective education.

7. The Conference should develop an audit mechanism as part of their national safeguarding regime. The Commission is prepared to accompany the development of this audit mechanism.
8. The bishops should promptly submit their answers to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
9. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Gabon (last reviewed in 2016):

- » The Government of Gabon reportedly "...has registered 492 street children in five of the country's nine provinces, and coverage by the Catholic Church's Arc-en-Ciel Centre has gradually risen to 70 per cent".⁶⁵ The Government of Gabon also reported "...the Arc-en-Ciel Centre of the Catholic Church is the only programme working in the areas of the recuperation, reception, education, psychosocial care, and reintegration of street children".⁶⁶
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted concerns for vulnerable populations in Gabonese society who are at greater risk of gender-based violence, due to discrimination and marginalisation.⁶⁷
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted deep concern "about cases of sexual abuse of children in the home, including incest, and in schools and public spaces. It is also concerned, about the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators and the reticence of survivors to file or proceed with formal complaints for fear of reprisals".⁶⁸
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted concern about "the prevalence of violence and abuse against students, including sexual violence and harassment, in educational settings and the impunity of perpetrators".⁶⁹

⁶⁵ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), *Second periodic reports of States parties due in 2001: Gabon* (22 January 2015), par. 29, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGAB%2F2&Lang=en.

⁶⁶ Ibid., par. 375.

⁶⁷ CRC, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Gabon* (8 July 2016), par. 22, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGAB%2FCO%2F2&Lang=en.

⁶⁸ Ibid., par. 32.

⁶⁹ Ibid., par. 55(e).



CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE OF JAPAN

Profile

Japan is a nation with 15 dioceses. It relies on the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 11 April 2024.

カトリック中央協議会

• Safeguarding overview

- » The answers to the standard quinquennial questionnaire were very comprehensive. The Commission welcomes the commitment from the Conference to complete the supplemental safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
- » The Conference expressed interest in the Memorare Initiative in Japan.
- » The Conference expressed interest in the *Universal Guidelines Framework*, including the Conference's willingness to participate in the *Universal Guidelines Framework* pilot programme.
- » The "Protection of the Human Rights of Women and Children Desk" is the main national office for safeguarding, under the leadership of Bishop Michael Gorō Matsuura, Bishop of Nagoya.
- » The Apostolic Nuncio in Japan, H.E. Mons. Francisco Escalante Molina, is very engaged on safeguarding.
- » There are robust diocesan safeguarding offices in the Archdiocese of Osaka and the Archdiocese of Tokyo. The Commission thanks the local ordinaries for their leadership in the local Church's safeguarding ministry and notes certain notably good practices in these diocesan offices, including a 24-hour reporting phone number and collaboration with lay experts for receiving reports.
- » The national guideline document, "Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults", went into force in 2021. The Commission notes particularly robust protocols for responding to allegations and managing perpetrators. Notably, this document makes specific reference to the updated safeguarding-related provisions set out in *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission also notes the establishment of a committee to monitor the implementation of the new guidelines.
- » The Conference has a Section of the Pastoral Care of Youth.
- » There is an established priority for youth formation in many dioceses.
- » The Conference has a Section for the Ongoing Formation of Priests.
- » A particularly good practice is the Conference's Day of Prayer and Penance for Victims and Survivors of Sexual Abuse, held annually. This Day of Prayer and Penance is also well publicized on the homepage of the Conference's website. Moreover, the bishops proposed the idea that, on the Day of Prayer and Penance for Victims of Sexual Abuse, each diocese publish a statement of commitment to safeguarding.

- » The Japan Catholic Committee for Justice and Peace's gives consideration to specific initiatives to address gender inequality and LGBTQ discrimination in the local Church. The Commission also notes the commendable anti-discrimination work done by the Conference through their "Committee against BURAKU Discrimination through Human-Rights Approaches". The Commission notes how the issues of gender inequality, anti-LGBTQ discrimination, and anti-Buraku discrimination have important safeguarding implications.
- » The translation into Japanese and subsequent publication of Apostolic Constitution *Pascite gregem Dei* reforming Book VI of the Code of Canon Law on August 20, 2022. The Commission highlights this as a good practice, making this document accessible to the local Church.
- » There are training courses for seminarians, including curriculum covering the dignity of persons, priests' relationship with sexuality, and expectations of priests in ministry.
- » The 2019 Bishops' Survey on the Response to Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy and Religious.
- » The Conference asks each diocese to annually produce an internal report about their respective initiatives in child protection and any reported allegations of abuse.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes that the Conference still needs to complete the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
- » The Conference reports diocesan safeguarding desks in all dioceses, but these structures' full compliance with the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*, Article 2, is still a question to be explored, especially given important challenges faced by the local Church.
- » The Archdiocese of Tokyo is suffering a vocations crisis and has made itself open to priests wishing to change their diocesan affiliation. This raises questions of proper vetting processes for clergy wanting to change affiliation.
- » While the national guidelines provide good definitions, there are still questions about the definition of vulnerable adults, especially given a rise in cases involving vulnerable adults.
- » The Conference acknowledges the need to update its safeguarding guidelines to include clearer case-management protocols.
- » Many dioceses offer formation courses for lay people, but it is unclear if these formation courses include any provision for safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes the different and complex cultural dynamics from non-Japanese immigrants participating in and leading ministry.
- » One ecclesiastical province explicitly reported difficulties for victims/survivors in accessing counselling and therapy.
- » There are inadequate provisions for victim/survivor accompaniment in the 2021 national guidelines.



- » The Conference has stated its commitment to fully collaborating with the civil authorities, in accordance with Japanese law. However, the Commission notes a lack of formal provisions for collaborating with the civil authorities in the 2021 national guidelines.
- » There is a linguistic challenge to overcome for all safeguarding material due to many immigrant priests and lay faithful in Japan.
- » There are approximately 25,000 United States military troops on Okinawa, which adds a pastoral complexity to the region.
- » The Commission notes the Conference's criteria for communications in response to an allegation of abuse, but notes the lack of a specific protocol in place to ensure effective and culturally responsive public communications regarding abuse.
- » There are no centres for the management and treatment of perpetrators, which creates linguistic challenges when perpetrators must then be sent to other countries for treatment.
- » The Commission notes a significant shortage of trained lawyers and legal practitioners in the dioceses, as well as several dioceses that do not have an established diocesan tribunal.
- » There are limited human resources to address cases of abuse with a robust victim-centered approach.
- » Many of the dioceses in Japan are small, with very limited financial resources.
- » The Commission notes the lack of a code of conduct to codify behavioural expectations for the clergy and pastoral agents.
- » The bishops expressed concerns about the clergy being oblivious to some of Pope Francis's magisterium. This brings into question the clergy's knowledge of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » The bishops expressed concerns about the complicated and unclear dynamics of accountability and oversight for religious congregations, which are very present in Japan. The Commission notes its own concern about the lack of effective cooperation between bishops and religious around allegations of abuse committed by religious.
- » The Commission notes that in October 2021 there was an "examination of audit guidelines" by the Protection of the Human Rights of Women and Children Desk. The scope of this examination is unclear and there is no indication of any audit mechanism in place.
- » The Conference stated the need to update its questionnaire to the dioceses regarding the annual collection of data concerning allegations of abuse. The Commission welcomes the Conference's commitment to addressing this need.

Recommendations

1. The bishops should promptly complete the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
2. The Conference should adopt the Memorare Initiative in Japan, in close collaboration with the men and women religious major superiors. The Commission recommends exploring the Conference's "Combined Committee for Bishops and Religious" as a platform to promote this collaboration for a One Church approach to safeguarding. The Commission recommends that the Memorare Initiative particularly focus on enhancing the local Church's offer of accompaniment to victims/survivors.
3. The bishops should implement their proposal for each diocese to publish a statement of their safeguarding commitment on the Day of Prayer and Reparation for Victims of Sexual Abuse. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
4. The Commission recommends a joint conversation among the Commission, the Conference, and the Apostolic Nunciature to collaborate on the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
5. The Commission recommends the review and publication of the procedures in place for scrupulously vetting international clergy (both religious and diocesan) and pastoral agents working in the Church in Japan. The same procedures should apply for interdiocesan assignments or transfers.
6. The Liaison Council of Catholic Youth, which aims to exchange information and to facilitate interaction among its members from the different dioceses, should be leveraged to solicit youth contributions to safeguarding policy development.
7. The Commission recommends close collaboration between the Section of the Pastoral Care of Youth, the Section for the Ongoing Formation of Priests, and the Protection of the Human Rights of Women and Children Desk.
8. The Commission notes that "Protect All Life" was the theme of Pope Francis's apostolic visit to Japan in 2019, and recommends that the Conference reflect on how Pope Francis's teachings during his visit might inspire and animate the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
9. All formation courses for lay people should include safeguarding modules.
10. The national guidelines should be updated to include further provisions for the offer of victim/survivor accompaniment services and collaboration with the civil authorities. The Commission remains available to accompany this guideline review.
11. The Conference should publish information regarding the membership, scope, and statutes of the new committee established to oversee the implementation of the new guidelines.

12. The Commission recommends the development of an effective and culturally responsive communication protocol in addressing abuse, one that can meaningfully build on the Conference's existing criteria for communications. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
13. A code of conduct should be developed to formalize behavioural expectations for the clergy and pastoral agents.
14. The Commission recommends a sensitisation campaign for the clergy covering the specifics of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
15. The Conference should share with the Commission the results of the "2022 Survey on the Formation of Permanent Deacons in Japan" and the "Lifelong Training Programme for Priests in the Churches of Japan", for joint study and reflection.
16. A robust audit mechanism should be developed for the local Church's safeguarding framework. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
17. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Japan (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of Japan reported 117 arrests in 2015 for child sexual abuse; 150 arrests in 2014; 103 arrests in 2013; 112 arrests in 2012; and 96 arrests in 2011.⁷⁰
- » The Government of Japan reported 1,521 consultations on sexual abuse handled by child consultation centres in fiscal year 2015.⁷¹
- » The Citizens and NGOs Association for the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child Japan (civil society organisation) noted, "Sexual abuse has been estimated to be very low in Japan, and is believed to be much lower than in Europe and the U.S. However, there is not any statistical evi-

⁷⁰ CRC, *Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Japan due in 2016, Annex 3: Statistical Information* (1 November 2017), Sec. I.2, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FADR%2FJPN%2F28102&Lang=en.

⁷¹ Ibid., Sec. II.25.

dence, and in Europe and the U.S. the number was believed to be very low some tens of years ago. It could imply that the actual number of sexual abuses in Japan may well be much larger, several times larger at least".⁷²

- » The General Research Institute of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — Japan (civil society organisation) noted, "While 1,622 cases of child sexual abuse were reported to child guidance centres in 2016/17, the number of arrests on the ground of child sexual abuse was limited to 162 in 2016... One of the reasons why sexual abuse of children remains hidden is the lack of professionals who can conduct interviews of child victims in appropriate manners (forensic interviewing)".⁷³



EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Profile

Equatorial Guinea is a nation with five dioceses. It relies on the Conferencia Episcopal de Guinea Ecuatorial as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 10 June 2024.

Safeguarding overview

- » The "Comisión episcopal de Pastoral Juvenil y de la infancia" is the Conference's primary safeguarding body at the national level.
- » The Conference expressed openness to and a request for closer accompaniment from the Commission in its safeguarding ministry.
- » The Conference's national safeguarding document was published in May 2024. The Commission acknowledges that the canonical provisions referenced in the guideline document are precise and updated. The Commission welcomes the Code of Conduct contained in the guideline document.
- » The bishops reported the publication of pastoral letters inviting people to denounce cases of abuse.
- » The bishops expressed their commitment during the *ad limina* visit to training all those who work in Church spaces.

⁷² Citizens and NGOs Association for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Japan, *The childhood impoverishment in Japan under the neo-liberal and neo-nationalistic momentum* (November 2017), Chapter 18.2.1, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FNGO%2FJPN%2F29989&Lang=en.

⁷³ Committee for NGO Reporting on the CRC (Japan), *Implementation of the CRC in Japan: Perspectives of NGOs on the Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report of Japan* (October 2017), Sec. V.5, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FNGO%2FJPN%2F29990&Lang=en.

- » The safeguarding guideline document mentions local civil law in Equatorial Guinea.
- » The Diocese of Ebibeyin has a Vicar for the Clergy who oversees the accompaniment of seminarians, the ongoing formation for clergy, and problems in the minor seminary.
- » The Apostolic Nunciature in Equatorial Guinea (based in Yaoundé, Cameroon) provided support in transmitting the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire to the Conference ahead of the *ad limina* visit.

• Challenges

- » The Commission regrets to have not received responses to its safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
- » The safeguarding guideline document does not contain any mention of procedures for receiving complaints. This brings into question the Conference's compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2.
- » There is a lack of clarity about the responsibilities and mandate of the "Comisión episcopal de Pastoral Juvenil y de la infancia", as the Conference's leading safeguarding body.
- » The bishops acknowledged a need to better ensure the implementation of the safeguarding guidelines, now that they have been published.
- » The Commission notes problems connected with inadequate formation for lay groupings of the faithful, including youth groups.
- » The safeguarding guideline document lacks any mention of care and support for victims/survivors and their families.
- » There is a perceived lack of collaboration on safeguarding with the religious in the local Church.
- » There is no separate Conference of Religious; instead, the bishops and major superiors are grouped in the same Conference. The Commission expresses concern about the proportional representation of religious on matters of safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes concern about local anti-gay sentiment in society and the marginalisation of potential victims/survivors who were abused by a perpetrator of the same sex.
- » The safeguarding guideline document lacks any reference to the handling of perpetrators.
- » The safeguarding guideline document lacks any provisions regarding the selection and formation of candidates for the priesthood.
- » Not all dioceses have a contact person for child protection identified at the diocesan level.
- » There is a lack of trained personnel in safeguarding.
- » There is a lack of physical infrastructure, which presents a challenge to robust safeguarding formation programming.
- » Comprehensive and standardised preventive screening measures are essential, considering the high number of foreign missionary priests working in the dioceses.
- » There is currently no audit mechanism in the local Church's safeguarding regime.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends that the bishops of Equatorial Guinea accept the Commission's invitation to respond to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
2. Local safeguarding guidelines must maintain standards conforming to the relevant norms set out in the *Universal Guidelines Framework* that the Commission has been developing and which is already operational in its principles. The Conference should consider updating its guidelines to include care and support for victims/survivors and their families, a clear mandate for the national safeguarding body, collaboration with religious, clear procedures for receiving reports, a protocol for handling perpetrators, procedures for the selection of candidates for the priesthood, the identification of contact persons for child protection at the local level, the provision of safeguarding formation (initial and ongoing), and the vetting of foreign priests working in the local Church. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
3. The Commission encourages the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Equatorial Guinea as a way to build capacity around the implementation and sensitisation of the national safeguarding guidelines. The Memorare Initiative would also work toward compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2.
4. The Commission requests copies of the pastoral letters written by the bishops, inviting people to denounce cases of abuse. These pastoral letters are a potential good practice to share with other conferences.
5. The Commission asks for additional information from the Conference about the Federación de Religiosos de Guinea Ecuatorial (FE.R.G.E.) and its collaboration with the Conference.
6. The Commission recommends the prompt development of an audit mechanism in the local Church's safeguarding regime. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
7. The Commission recommends mobilising the Equipo de Coordinación de Infancia Misionera in the Diocese of Ebibeyin in order to facilitate child-friendly safeguarding instruction. This could also be a good practice to replicate across the dioceses.
8. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

• Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Equatorial Guinea (last reviewed in 2004):

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended "a study of the sexual exploitation of children in order to assess its scope and causes, enable effective monitoring of the problem and develop measures and programmes, including social reintegration programmes, to prevent, combat and eliminate it".⁷⁴
- » The Government of Equatorial Guinea reported, "Despite the measures that had been taken to improve protection of children's rights, several challenges remained. For the most part, the public remained unaware of the Convention, and few statistics had been gathered on child labour, child prostitution and child abuse. There was no coordination between the agencies responsible for developing policies and programmes to protect children's rights, and such policies and programmes were often ineffective owing to insufficient human, financial and material resources. Domestic violence against women and children had not been eliminated, and information on violence, sexual abuse and ill-treatment was scarce. Social services continued to be in short supply..."⁷⁵



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ETHIOPIA

Profile

Ethiopia is a nation with 13 dioceses and eparchies. It relies on the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 26 June 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » A Memorandum of Understanding for the Memorare Initiative was signed in Ethiopia. H.E. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel signed for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia, while Rev. Fr. Hailemariam Medhin Tesfey, S.D.B and Rev. Sr. Perpetua Apo signed for the Conference of Major Religious Superiors of Ethiopia. The Commission shares its gratitude for their leadership.

- » There were robust responses to the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire from most dioceses.
- » A successful delegation visit to Ethiopia in October 2023 for a clergy safeguarding training session was facilitated by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA). This delegation visit established a meaningful relationship between the Commission and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia. The Commission thanks the former Secretary General, the then-Abba Lukas Teshome Fikre Woldetsensae, now Bishop of Emdeber, for his leadership in facilitating this relationship.
- » The bishops invited the then-Secretary of the Commission, Fr. Andrew Small OMI, to address their Plenary Assembly in December 2023. On this occasion, Fr. Small was able to discuss the Commission's mandate, the Memorare Initiative, and the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire, ahead of the bishops' *ad limina* visit.
- » The bishops have acknowledged the importance of engaging senior management in all Church organisations, to effectively promote a culture of safeguarding.
- » There is a reported safeguarding commitment in the Church-wide ten-year plan, and the procurement of additional staff, who are contributing to progress in safeguarding.
- » The Child Protection Commission and the Protection and Safeguarding Council at the Catholic Bishops Conference of Ethiopia are the two main safeguarding organs at the national level.
- » The Conference's safeguarding policies are published online, which is a good practice.
- » A safeguarding budget is reportedly factored into every project at the Conference.
- » Many dioceses report a dedicated safeguarding budget.
- » There are Codes of Conduct, developed in collaboration with the Conference's Human Resources unit, to build safe environments.
- » The Archdiocese of Addis Ababa's guidelines provide for victim/survivor accompaniment services.
- » There is a plan in the Archdiocese of Addis Ababa to train lay pastoral workers in safeguarding.
- » The bishops report healthy relationships with the religious in some of the dioceses.
- » There is an agreement between the Vicariate of Sodo and the civil authorities on matters of safeguarding.
- » The Vicariate of Nekemte has a case management protocol.
- » There is a high rate of safeguarding training among the clergy due to awareness raising by the Conference's safeguarding office. The Commission notes that various training and awareness programmes were conducted, alongside collaborative workshops with the priest associations' annual meetings.
- » The bishops mentioned a need for periodic reporting as a way of accounting for key lessons learned, and to promote a culture of safeguarding.

⁷⁴ CRC, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention, Concluding observations: Equatorial Guinea* (3 November 2004), par. 59(a), retrieved at [CRC/C/15/Add.245](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/4d4d4d4d).

⁷⁵ CRC, *Summary record of the 989th meeting* (1 October 2024), par. 10, retrieved at [CRC/C/SR.989](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/4d4d4d4d).

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes some resistance from the local ordinaries to take direct responsibility for sexual abuse, and reminds the local Churches of the need to fully embrace their safeguarding ministry.
- » The Commission similarly notes some resistance to the Church's taking responsibility for the actions of Church personnel amid reports that other institutions are not held to such a standard.
- » The most recent national safeguarding guidelines were published in 2018, and do not reflect recent updates to *Vos estis lux mundi* or Book VI of the Code of Canon Law, or the 2022 "*Vademecum* on certain points of procedure in treating cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics" (Ver. 2.0).
- » The national safeguarding guidelines are weak on provisions for victim/survivor accompaniment.
- » The Church in Ethiopia is a large provider of education and healthcare, giving it a huge responsibility in caring for minors.
- » There is a lack of clarity as to who is subject to mandatory signing of the Code of Conduct.
- » The bishops expressed concern about a lack of dedicated staff for the safeguarding offices at both the national and diocesan levels.
- » The Commission similarly notes concern about a lack of safeguarding professionals in many of the dioceses to accompany victims/survivors directly.
- » There is a lack of protocols for communicating with victims/survivors.
- » There is significant trauma experienced by the clergy, the faithful, and society at large in Ethiopia due to various forms of abuse resulting from political conflict. The Commission attentively notes the bishops' deep concerns about the country's ongoing conflict in the Tigray region, which is leading to tremendous suffering among the child population in that region, including sexual abuse but also human trafficking and a staggering number of children left without guardians.
- » There is a need for further relationship-building with civil authorities amid general concerns about the difficulties faced by victims/survivors in trusting the civil authorities.
- » The Commission notes little mention of collaboration with lay associations in the local Church.
- » Cultural taboos prevent victims/survivors from reporting.
- » There is a lack of case management protocols in many of the dioceses.
- » There is a lack of dedicated financial resources for case management in many of the dioceses.
- » Safeguarding teams and offices exist, but not in every diocese, which brings into question the Conference's compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » There is currently no audit mechanism built into the Conference's safeguarding regime.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends swift action on next steps associated with the implementation of the Memorare Initiative in Ethiopia. The Commission remains ready to closely accompany those next steps through its Regional Group Africa. The prompt development of the Memorare Initiative in Ethiopia promises to address challenges arising from a lack of safeguarding professionals and dedicated staff for safeguarding initiatives and outreach. The Memorare Initiative will also assist in working toward full compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
2. The Commission invites the dioceses that have not yet submitted a reply to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire to do so promptly.
3. The Commission recommends an in-person meeting between the leadership of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia and the Commission's Regional Group Africa, in particular its member from Ethiopia. The Commission remains ready to facilitate this meeting to help manifest the Commission's closeness to the local Church in Ethiopia.
4. The national safeguarding guidelines should be updated to reflect changes in Universal Law and the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission suggests particular attention to victim/survivor accompaniment services.
5. All Codes of Conduct should be signed by all those working in Church institutions.
6. Protocols should be developed for communicating with victims/survivors.
7. The Commission requests more information from the Vicariate of Sodo regarding its agreement with the civil authorities. The Commission's Regional Group Africa is interested in learning more about the Vicariate's experience with this agreement.
8. The Commission recommends the full adoption of a One Church approach to safeguarding for the local Church in Ethiopia. The Commission remains available to provide assistance.
9. The Commission recommends exploring how the civil authorities might be able to partner with the local Church in the identification of professionals in the field of medical services, mental health services, and social services to augment the Church's efforts.
10. Robust case management protocols should be developed and implemented in the dioceses, consistent with the Conference's ten-year plan. The Regional Group Africa is available to accompany this initiative.
11. Priest associations' annual meetings are a good opportunity to provide ongoing safeguarding training and to foster a context of pastoral reflection that safeguarding is an integral part of care in ministry.
12. The Commission recommends a direct meeting between the Regional Group Africa and the Bishop-delegate for the Child Protection Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia.

13. An audit mechanism should be developed and implemented in the Conference's safeguarding regime. The Regional Group Africa remains available to accompany this initiative.
14. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Ethiopia (under review in 2025):

- » The Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (civil society organisation) reported, "A study conducted by UNICEF on the basis of a sample of 1000 households revealed 10% of children between the age 12 and 17 have experienced some kind of OCSEA which includes online grooming/solicitation of children for sexual purposes, sexting, sextortion (sexual extortion), live streaming of child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse / exploitation material (child pornography)".⁷⁶
- » The Elizka Relief Foundation (civil society organisation) reported, "Ethiopia Facts and Statistics monitors about 300,000 children aged 12 to 17 years who have been victims of violence, sexual exploitation and abuse via the Internet, equivalent to 10% of children who use the Internet in one year. This is due to the weakness, fragility and lack of clarity in the mechanisms for reporting child sexual abuse and exploitation".⁷⁷
- » Save the Children (civil society organisation) reported, "Well integrated and comprehensive child protection support systems and adequate services on sexual abuse of girls in non-school settings have not been put in place".⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA), *CSO Complementary Report to Ethiopia's 6th and 7th Combined State Party Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2015–2020* (February 2024), Chapter 5.5, retrieved at: [Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations \(CCRDA\)-NGO-Ethiopia-PSWG](#).

⁷⁷ Elizka Relief Foundation, *Shadow report on children's rights in Ethiopia Committee on the Rights of the Child* (2024), Ch. Sixth, retrieved at [Elizka Relief Foundation-NGO-Ethiopia-PSWG](#).

⁷⁸ Save the Children, *Child-Led Alternative report on the implementation of the convention on the rights of the child in Ethiopia* (February 2024), n. 3.3.1, retrieved at [Save the Children-Children's Report-Ethiopia-PSWG](#).



EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GUINEA (CONAKRY)

Profile

Guinea (Conakry) is a nation with five dioceses. It relies on the Conférence Épiscopale de la Guinée as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 19 June 2024.

Safeguarding overview

- » The Conference's national safeguarding guidelines were originally published in 2019 and subsequently updated in February 2025.
- » The Conference's 2019 safeguarding document was reportedly disseminated throughout the country to priests, religious, and those working in Church institutes.
- » The 2019 national safeguarding guidelines provide a robust protocol for responding to an allegation.
- » A special commission at the Conference was reportedly established to receive reports of abuse.
- » Youth association formation opportunities in the Diocese of Gueckédou demonstrate the Diocese of Gueckédou's acknowledgement of the need to better form the lay faithful, and especially families.
- » There are catechetical formation centres in some dioceses that can be used for safeguarding formation courses.
- » "L'Institut des prêtres missionnaires de la Royauté du Christ" (Fraternité Franciscaine) in the Diocese of Kankan focuses on ongoing priestly formation/retreats.
- » The "Organisation catholique pour la promotion humaine" is a national organisation formed by the bishops' conference with diocesan offices.
- » The Apostolic Nuncio in Guinea Conakry has expressed solidarity and support for safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes the encouraging establishment, in April 2024, of the Conference of Major Superiors and Delegates in Guinea as the national federation of religious major superiors.

Challenges

- » The Commission regrets to have not received a response to its safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire. The Commission acknowledges the bishops' voiced concern about scarce human resources to compile the data requested in this questionnaire.
- » The Conference's national safeguarding guidelines published in 2019 did not include recent updates to *Vos estis lux mundi* or Book VI of the Code of Canon Law, or the new "*Vademecum* on certain points of procedure in treating cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics" (Ver. 2.0).



- » The Commission notes a lack of response to the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding its observations on the Conference's guidelines.
- » Certain dioceses have difficulty with reaching some villages, because of a lack of means of transportation and poor infrastructure.
- » The lack of a Conference of Religious in the local Church formerly posed challenges in promoting a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » Dire economic conditions for most diocesan faithful increase the risk of abuse and create challenges for the local Church's safeguarding efforts.
- » The Commission notes concern about the bishops' resistance to formalised protocols, citing their lack of cultural relevance in Guinea (Conakry).
- » The cultural taboo that exists around sexual abuse creates issues related to civil complaints and exacerbates parental pressure for a culture of silence.
- » The 2019 national safeguarding guidelines do not provide for dedicated offices to receive reports, as required in *Vos estis lux mundi*. Therefore, compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi* is in question.
- » The national safeguarding guidelines could provide more direction on the care and accompaniment of victims.
- » The Commission notes a significant lack of safeguarding formation available in the local Church. These challenges are confirmed by local Church authorities.
- » The Conference's safeguarding regime does not provide for an audit mechanism.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends that the Conference promptly complete the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire. The Commission remains available to accompany this effort directly, given scarce human resources, and can send a delegation to Guinea (Conakry) to directly assist in the data collection if the Conference deems it helpful.
2. A comprehensive review of the Conference's updated guidelines published in February 2025 will be conducted by the Commission according to the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission requests the Conference's proactive and energetic engagement with this review process.
3. The Commission recommends the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Guinea (Conakry) to supplement and build capacity around the local Church's safeguarding ministry. The Memorare Initiative in Guinea (Conakry) could include a needed budget for a means of transportation so that safeguarding services might reach more rural villages. It could also include provisions for formation, sensitisation on the impact of abuse in a culturally appropriate curriculum, and victim/survivor accompaniment services that meet the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission especially recommends that this formation and sensitisation address the cultural taboo around sexual abuse.

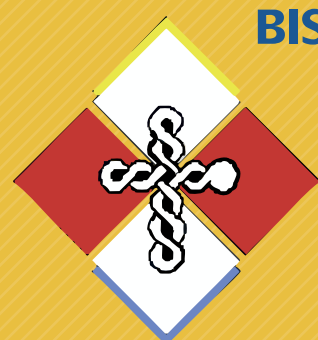
4. The Diocese of Gueckédou's youth association formation opportunities should include modules on safeguarding.
5. The Commission requests more information from the Conference on how it collaborates with the religious ministering in the local Church. The Commission recommends the Conference's close collaboration on safeguarding with the newly established Conference of Major Superiors and Delegates in Guinea. Such a collaboration should be in pursuit of a One Church approach to safeguarding.
6. The Commission recommends that "L'Institut des prêtres missionnaires de la Royauté du Christ (Fraternité Franciscaine)" in the Diocese of Kankan be used to offer ongoing safeguarding formation for the clergy, including from across the Conference. The Commission remains available to accompany the design of such a programme through the adoption of the Memorare Initiative.
7. The "Organisation catholique pour la promotion humaine" should be leveraged to promote the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
8. The national safeguarding guidelines should include protocols for vetting candidates for the priesthood.
9. The Commission recommends the development and implementation of an audit mechanism, and remains available to accompany this initiative.
10. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

- » The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Guinea-Conakry (last reviewed in 2019):
- » The Government of Guinea-Conakry reported 126 cases of rape against a child (under the age of 18) over the three-year period prior to 2019.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ CRC, *List of issues in relation to the combined third to sixth periodic reports of Guinea, Addendum, Replies of Guinea to the list of issues* (23 November 2018), Part III.18.b, retrieved at [CRC/C/GIN/Q/3-6/Add.1](https://www.crc.org/docs/default-source/press-releases/2018-11-23-guinea-replies-to-list-of-issues.pdf).

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted deep concern that “child victims of violence often lack access to justice, particularly in cases of sexual violence, due to social stigma, a lack of understanding of judicial processes, low rates of investigation and prosecution, and the mediation and influence of parents and of public or religious figures”.⁸⁰
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted serious concern about “The insufficient security for girls in schools, who are particularly at risk of sexual harassment and abuse by teachers”.⁸¹



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Profile

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a nation with four dioceses. It relies on the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 8 May 2024.2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » There is a Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina for the Protection of Minors, with statutes approved in July 2023.
- » The Archdiocesan and Metropolitan Office for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults was established in July 2023, in the Archdiocese of Sarajevo. The Commission notes the nomination of the Archdiocesan delegate for safeguarding in July 2023.
- » The Archdiocese of Sarajevo's reporting desk includes a dedicated phone number, contact email address, and other information published on the archdiocesan website.
- » The bishops were very open to collaborating with the Commission. The Commission especially acknowledges the Conference's proactive request for the Commission's accompaniment in a review of the national safeguarding guidelines.
- » A comprehensive report was provided by the Archdiocese of Sarajevo in response to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire.
- » The Conference's national safeguarding guidelines were published in 2015 and were endorsed by the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

⁸⁰ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined third to sixth periodic reports of Guinea* (28 February 2019), par. 27.b, retrieved at [CRC/C/GIN/CO/3-6](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/C/CO/3-6).

⁸¹ Ibid., par. 38.b.

- » The Archdiocesan Youth Pastoral Centre — Protocol for the Protection of Children was promulgated in 2018 by the Archdiocese of Sarajevo.
- » In 2022, the Archdiocesan Youth Pastoral Centre in Sarajevo hosted an interdisciplinary conference on child protection with over 120 participants from a myriad of entities (governmental, non-governmental, and ecclesiastical) that work with children. The themes included “Pain, forgiveness, and reconciliation — the high-risk journey of healing processes”. The Commission notes another programme in the Archdiocesan Youth Pastoral Centre called “Because we care”, offering training to everyone that works with children in the local Church.
- » The Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina — Manual for the Protection of Users, Personnel, and Collaborators of Caritas in Bosnia and Herzegovina was published in 2019.
- » Candidates for Holy Orders in the Archdiocese of Sarajevo's academic faculties attend a mandatory two-day seminar where topics around child protection and affective education are discussed. Candidates are also often given psychological evaluations, and the archdiocesan counselling centre is actively involved in formation for candidates to Holy Orders.
- » The bishops meet jointly, once a year, with the Conference of Religious. The Commission also notes a bishop-delegate who regularly participates in the Conference of Religious's meetings. Safeguarding was reportedly a topic in one of the recent meetings held by the Conference of Religious.
- » The bishops mentioned a dedicated chapter in the national safeguarding guidelines that speaks directly about the responsibilities of the major superiors. The Commission welcomes the Conference President's statement that the bishops' safeguarding Committee is at the service of both the bishops and the major superiors, which is consistent with the Commission's One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » The Metropolitan Office for Child Protection in the Archdiocese of Sarajevo assists throughout the ecclesiastical province, including religious and lay movements present in the territory. The Metropolitan Office's team reportedly includes lay members.
- » The Archdiocese of Sarajevo is committed to cooperating with the civil authorities in cases of abuse.
- » Caritas Bosnia-Herzegovina reportedly has a Code of Conduct.
- » The Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina for the Protection of Minors reportedly promotes formation opportunities for all those working in the local Church, including teachers, parents, pastoral agents, lay, and clergy (seminary and ongoing).
- » The 26th Council of Priests in the Archdiocese of Sarajevo was reportedly dedicated to the permanent safeguarding formation of the clergy.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes the opportunity to develop with more clarity the mandates and jurisdictions shared between the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina for the Protection of Minors, and the Archdiocesan and Metropolitan Office for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults in Sarajevo.

- » The Archdiocese of Sarajevo does not have dedicated finances for safeguarding, due to limited resources.
- » The procedure in the guidelines for receiving complaints could be better defined. In addition, the guidelines are not easily accessible to the public.
- » In general, the guidelines lack concrete provisions for significant prevention strategies, the accompaniment of victims/survivors, coordination with civil law in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and an audit mechanism — and contain only a brief mention of the training of seminarians and priests.
- » The Commission notes concern about the lack of a code of conduct in the local Church, despite the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith formally recommending one, although the Commission acknowledges the Conference's resource limitations in developing such a code of conduct.
- » There are persistent issues of trauma and abuse that might be remnants of past conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Recommendations

1. The Commission requests that the dioceses that have yet to respond to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire do so promptly.
2. The Commission recommends the development of a code of conduct for the local Church and is ready to accompany this initiative in light of limited resources — both financial and human — in the local Church. The Commission recommends the Conference's adoption of the Memorare Initiative for these purposes, and to build capacity around the local Church's safeguarding ministry. This could include a powerful "train the trainer" model, victim/survivor accompaniment services, and efforts toward full compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
3. The national safeguarding guidelines should be published on the Conference's website and available throughout the local Church.
4. The Commission requests a copy of the statutes for the Commission of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina for the Protection of Minors, approved in July 2023.
5. The Commission asks for more information on the Conference's *Ratio nationalis* regarding the safeguarding provisions therein.
6. The Archdiocese of Sarajevo should explore the possibility of a formal agreement with the civil authorities on addressing and responding to cases of abuse.
7. The Commission asks for a copy of the Archdiocesan Youth Pastoral Centre — Protocol for the Protection of Children, promulgated in 2018 by the Archdiocese of Sarajevo.
8. The Commission asks for a copy of the Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina — Manual for the Protection of Users, Personnel, and Collaborators of Caritas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, published in 2019.

9. The Commission asks for data on training courses offered at the Archdiocesan Youth Pastoral Centre.
10. An audit mechanism for the local Church's safeguarding regime should be developed and implemented.
11. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Bosnia and Herzegovina (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) reported "in the Appendix allegations of clerical abuse of minors involving both Islam and Catholic clerics".⁸²
- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) noted concerns about the potential underreporting of cases of clerical sexual abuse.⁸³
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child shared concern about "the prevalence of violence against children, including peer violence in schools and online".⁸⁴

⁸² National Secular Society, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Alternative Report on Bosnia Herzegovina for the 82nd session* (October 2018), par. 5, retrieved at [Bosnia & Herzegovina_NGO_National Secular Society_PSWG](#).

⁸³ Ibid., par. 4, 6.

⁸⁴ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (5 December 2019), par. 25(d), retrieved at [CRC/C/BIH/CO/5-6](#).



Profile

Portugal is a nation with 21 dioceses. It relies on the Conferência Episcopal Portuguesa (CEP) as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 24 May 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The bishops reflected on the value of opening their archives for review, and shared that this process was fundamental for their path of conversion.
- » The path of conversion to which the Portuguese bishops have committed is commendable. The Commission welcomes the bishops' documentation and description of this path of conversion on their website, which represents a meaningful pledge to transparency and accountability.
- » On 11 November 2021, the bishops' Final Communiqué of their Plenary Assembly approved the establishment of the Independent Commission for the Study of Sexual Abuse of Children in the Portuguese Catholic Church — headed by child psychiatrist Pedro Strecht.⁸⁵ On 2 December 2021, the members of the Independent Commission were publicly announced at a press conference held by Pedro Strecht.⁸⁶
- » A letter from the Vatican Secretary of State was published on 9 June 2022 regarding access to diocesan archives.⁸⁷
- » In February 2023, the Independent Commission published its 486-page report, "Giving Silence a Voice", with an executive summary in English.⁸⁸ The report releases validated testimonies relating to abuse cases that occurred between 1950 and 2022 and points to over 4,800 victims. The Commission's President, Cardinal Seán O'Malley, released a Statement in response to this publication.⁸⁹
- » On 13 February 2023, the President of the Conference issued a statement after the presentation of the Independent Commission's study.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ CEP, *Final communiqué of the 201st Plenary Assembly of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference* (11 November 2021), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/comunicado-final-da-201-a-assembleia-plenaria-da-conferencia-episcopal-portuguesa/>.

⁸⁶ CEP, *Independent Commission for the Study of Sexual Abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church: "Giving Voice to Silence"* (2 December 2021), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/comissao-independente-para-o-estudo-de-abusos-sexuais-na-igreja-catolica-portuguesa-dar-voz-ao-silencio/>.

⁸⁷ CEP, *Letter from the Vatican Secretary of State on access to diocesan archives* (30 June 2022), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/carta-do-secretario-de-estado-do-vaticano-sobre-o-acesso-aos-arquivos-diocesanos/>.

⁸⁸ BishopAccountability.org, *Independent Commission for the Study of Child Sexual Abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church, Final Report, Executive Summary* (February 2023), retrieved at <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/reports-2023-02-13-Independent-Commission-Portuguese-Catholic-Church-Executive-Summary-English.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, *Card. O'Malley on Importance of Portuguese Report* (17 February 2023), retrieved at <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/card-o-malley-on-importance-of-portuguese-report/>.

⁹⁰ CEP, *Statement by the President of the CEP after the presentation of the study by the Independent Commission* (14 February 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/declaracao-do-presidente-da-cep-apos-a-apresentacao-do-estudo-da-comissao-independente/>.

- » On 3 March 2023, the Conference held an Extraordinary Plenary Assembly in response to the Independent Commission's study.⁹¹
- » On 8 March 2023, the President of the Conference issued a statement declaring the Conference's commitment to cooperating with the civil authorities in a parliamentary hearing on sexual abuse where the Conference would be called to cooperate.⁹²
- » On 14 March 2023, the Permanent Council of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference issued a statement on their continued reflection in response to the Independent Commission's study.⁹³
- » On 13 April 2023, the Conference released a Note on an operational group for welcoming and monitoring victims/survivors of abuse, as decided in the 3 March 2023 Extraordinary Plenary Assembly. The Conference appointed psychologist Dr. Rute Agulhas as the group's coordinator.⁹⁴
- » On 20 April 2023, the bishops issued their Final Communiqué of the Plenary Assembly, where Dr. Rute Agulhas presented the project that will be called "Grupo VITA — Monitoring Group for situations of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults in the context of the Catholic Church in Portugal", with its mission and actions and a three-year time horizon. The members of the Executive and Advisor Groups of Grupo VITA were announced in the Final Communiqué.⁹⁵ Grupo Vita is specifically established to provide outreach to victims/survivors.
- » On 20 April 2023, there was a Eucharist for victims/survivors of sexual abuse, power, and conscience in the Church at the Conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the bishops' conference.⁹⁶ The Commission notes the published Universal prayer at the Mass dedicated to creating a safer Church.⁹⁷
- » On 25 July 2024, the Conference published a guidance document regarding requests for financial compensation.⁹⁸
- » The Conference's national safeguarding guidelines from 2023 — Manual for the Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Children and Vulnerable Adults in the Context of the Catholic Church in Portugal — was published online.⁹⁹

⁹¹ CEP, *Final statement of the 105th Extraordinary Plenary Assembly of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference* (3 March 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/comunicado-final-da-105-a-assembleia-plenaria-extraordinaria-da-conferencia-episcopal-portuguesa/>.

⁹² CEP, *Statement by the President of CEP (with audio)* (8 March 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/declaracao-do-presidente-da-cep/>.

⁹³ CEP, *Statement by the Permanent Council of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference* (14 March 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/comunicado-do-conselho-permanente-da-conferencia-episcopal-portuguesa-3/>.

⁹⁴ CEP, *CEP note on the operational group for the reception and support of victims of abuse* (14 April 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/nota-da-conferencia-episcopal-portuguesa-13-04-2023/>.

⁹⁵ CEP, *Final statement of the 206th Plenary Assembly of the CEP* (20 April 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/comunicado-final-da-206-a-assembleia-plenaria-da-cep/>.

⁹⁶ CEP, *Eucharistic Homily for Victims of Sexual Abuse, Power and Conscience in the Church* (20 April 2023), retrieved at <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/homilia-da-eucaristia-pelas-vitimas-de-abusos-sexuais-de-poder-e-consciencia-na-igreja/>.

⁹⁷ CEP, *National Day of Prayer for Victims of Abuse in Union with the Portuguese Episcopal Conference gathered at the Shrine of Fatima Universal Prayer* (20 April 2023), retrieved at https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/wp-content/uploads/2023/04-0_OracaoUniversal.pdf.

⁹⁸ Diocese of Braga, *Episcopal Conference publishes guidance document for requests for financial compensation* (25 July 2024), retrieved at <https://www.diocese-braga.pt/noticia/2024-07-25-conferencia-episcopal-divulga-documento-orientador-para-pedidos-de-compensacao-financeira-66a228fa9278a>.

⁹⁹ Grupo VITA, *Manual for the Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Children and Vulnerable Adults in the Context of the Catholic Church in Portugal* (2023), retrieved at https://grupovita.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AF-Manual_13_12_2023.pdf.

- » The contact and promotional material for Grupo VITA¹⁰⁰ and the Diocesan Commissions¹⁰¹ are easily accessible through a link on the Conference's homepage.
- » Grupo VITA's informative and up-to-date website is quite accessible. The Commission notes that Grupo VITA also has a Facebook page and an Instagram presence, which demonstrates cultural responsiveness in the social media age.
- » Although the bishops explained that it has been culturally challenging to address this issue, it has become easier to speak normally about sexual abuse over time. The normalisation of discussing abuse is a very positive development in the local Church as well as in civil society.
- » There are Diocesan Commissions in each diocese for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, with contact information listed in the Conference-wide directory.¹⁰²
- » The bishops expressed their satisfaction with the professionalism of the members of their diocesan commissions, and how effective their work has been.
- » Grupo VITA¹⁰³ and the diocesan commissions are involved in offering ongoing safeguarding training to create a culture of care.
- » There is a full directory for the Church in Portugal, recognised as a good practice for governance.¹⁰⁴
- » Grupo VITA has a dedicated channel for reporting that is easily accessible on their website, as well as through their social media outlets (Facebook and Instagram). Grupo VITA has committed to publishing annual activity reports. The first report was published in December 2023.¹⁰⁵

Challenges

- » The Commission regrets the lack of response to its safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire, sent to the bishops ahead of their *ad limina* visit.
- » Grupo VITA has only been planned for a three-year period, and will subsequently be subject to an evaluation, with no clarity on the criteria for such an evaluation. There is also a lack of clarity around the funding source for Grupo VITA's budget and the guarantees of sustainability therein.
- » The Commission notes concerns about the type of therapeutic services offered by Grupo VITA, and the extent to which these services ensure a victim-centered approach.
- » The Commission notes a lack of clarity in terms of who is responsible for sensitising the local Church to the national safeguarding guidelines.

¹⁰⁰ See <https://grupovita.pt/>.

¹⁰¹ Grupo VITA, *Protection of Minors*, retrieved at <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/770ac88df89a2f5f542fc695034924eb/protecao-de-menores/index.html>.

¹⁰² Contacts of the Catholic Church in Portugal, *List of Diocesan Commissions*, retrieved at https://www.anuariocaticoportugal.net/lista_comissoes.asp.

¹⁰³ Grupo VITA, *Formation and Training*, retrieved at <https://grupovita.pt/formacao-investigacao/>.

¹⁰⁴ Contacts of the Catholic Church in Portugal, retrieved at <https://www.anuariocaticoportugal.net/>.

¹⁰⁵ Grupo VITA, *Relatório de Atividades I* (December 2023), retrieved at https://grupovita.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Relatorio_de_Atividades_VF-DEZ-2023.pdf.

- » Information (including contact details) about the National Coordination Team's origins, background, statutes, scope, and members is hard to find, and there is no link to it on the Conference's website.
- » There are rising levels of online abuse in families and in the broader society, and the Conference is experiencing a growing need to address it in the local Church.
- » The Commission notes urgent concern about ease of access to the Independent Commission's Final Report. The only publicly accessible document seems to be the Executive Summary, published on BishopAccountability.org.¹⁰⁶
- » There is a lack of clarity regarding the Conference's relationship and cooperation with both the Conference of Religious and the Conference of Secular Institutes.
- » The bishops expressed the desire to better develop their dialogue with the media.
- » There are questions about what data the diocesan commissions collect.
- » There is a lack of clarity about the budget for safeguarding formation, and its sustainability.
- » There is a lack of clarity in the local Church as to who is required to receive safeguarding training.
- » The Commission notes concern about how thoroughly *Vos estis lux mundi* is captured in the Conference's national guidelines.
- » There is no audit mechanism in the Conference's guidelines.

Recommendations

1. The Commission requests the bishops' prompt attention to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire and the submission of their responses to the Commission.
2. The Commission recommends that the Conference proactively publish the criteria for the evaluation of Grupo VITA that is set to take place after three years. This will help clarify expectations and answer uncertainties about the group's future. The Commission further recommends that the Conference proactively publish information on Grupo VITA's budget and its guarantees of sustainability, as well as how Grupo VITA's therapeutic services ensure a victim-centered approach.
3. The Commission recommends a robust sensitisation campaign after the updating of the national safeguarding guidelines. The Commission's Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.
4. Information on the National Coordination Team's origins, background, statutes, scope, members, and contact information should be published.

¹⁰⁶ BishopAccountability.org, *Independent Commission for the Study of Child Sexual Abuse in the Portuguese Catholic Church, Final Report, Executive Summary* (February 2023), retrieved at <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/reports-2023-02-13-Independent-Commission-Portuguese-Catholic-Church-Executive-Summary-English.pdf>.

5. The Conference should continue to reflect on Pope Francis's teachings on safeguarding in the context of World Youth Day in Lisbon.
6. The Commission recommends the Conference's prompt attention to the domain address for the Independent Commission's Final Report. The official website must function properly in order to be accessible to the general public, especially victims/survivors.
7. The Commission would like to receive more information on the Conference's experience with the first Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors.
8. The Commission asks for more information on the Conference's relationship and cooperation with both the Conference of Religious and the Conference of Secular Institutes.
9. The Commission recommends robust data collection by the diocesan commissions to promote a data-driven culture of transparency and accountability.
10. The Commission recommends that Grupo VITA have a strong and clear mandate from the Conference to promote robust safeguarding training across the dioceses.
11. The Commission recommends the development and implementation of a robust audit mechanism.
12. The Commission recommends the guarantee of victims/survivors' place in policy auditing and development.
13. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

• Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Portugal (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of Portugal reported 275 criminal cases of sexual abuse of children and dependent minors in 2014 and 360 such cases in 2015.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ CRC, *Combined 5th and 6th Reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Annex 1, Table 10*, retrieved at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRC%2FADR%2FPRT%2F32449&Lang=en.

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child requested additional information from the Government of Portugal including "updated statistical data disaggregated by age, sex, type of disability, ethnic origin, national origin, geographic location and socioeconomic status, for the past three years, on the number of: ... Criminal accusations, prosecutions and convictions against sexual abusers of children among the clergy and in public institutions"¹⁰⁸
- » The Government of Portugal reported 360 cases of sexual abuse of children in 2017; 333 cases in 2016; and 351 cases in 2015.¹⁰⁹
- » The Portuguese Committee for UNICEF (civil society organisation) reported that "...in 2017, the majority of the 221 arrests for crimes 'against freedom and sexual self-determination' involved child victims, namely 98 were related to child sexual abuse and 34 for pornography. In relation to the crime of sexual abuse of children and adolescents, more than half of the victims were between 8 and 13 years old (68.5 per cent), followed by 4-7 years of age (19.1 per cent) and 0-3 years of age (6.7 percent). In 44.5 per cent of cases, the perpetrator had a relationship with the family".¹¹⁰
- » The Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights, the Association of Women Against Violence, and the Association of Women Without Borders, together with nine NGOs (civil society organisations), reported, "In 2018, 79% of the children who were sexually abused were girls. 70% of the victims of sexual abuse were between 8 and 13 years old. 98% of the perpetrators were men, mainly from the children's families (47%) or known to the children (23%) (RASI, 2018)".¹¹¹
- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) noted concerns about the potential underreporting of cases of clerical sexual abuse.¹¹²
- » The Portuguese Ombudsman (national human rights institution) reported serious concern "with the very high number of convictions for sexual abuse of children (which amounted, in the years 2014 and 2015, to 131 and 111 cases, respectively) and dependent children (which amounted, in the years 2014 and 2015, to 275 and 360 cases, respectively)".¹¹³
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern at "the insufficient resources allocated to the timely and effective identification and investigation of the sexual abuse of children, including in religious institutions and online".¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ CRC, *List of issues in relation to the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Portugal* (28 February 2019), par. 15(g), retrieved at [CRC/C/PRT/Q/5-6](#).

¹⁰⁹ CRC, *Replies of Portugal to the list of issues in relation to the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports* (4 July 2019), p. 15, retrieved at [CRC/C/PRT/Q/5-6/Add.1](#).

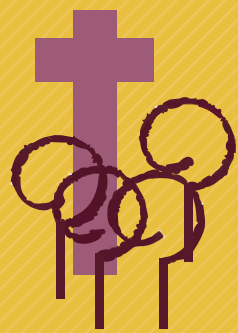
¹¹⁰ Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, *Alternative report to Portugal's Fifth and Sixth Periodic Report under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (November 2018), par. 129, retrieved at [Portugal_NGO_Portuguese Committee for UNICEF_PSWG](#).

¹¹¹ NGO Coalition, *Additional Submission on the combined 5th and 6th periodic reports of Portugal* (14 August 2019), p. 2, retrieved at [Portugal_NGO_Coalition Shadow Report Additional Submission Session](#).

¹¹² National Secular Society, *Alternative Report on Portugal prepared by the (UK) National Secular Society for the 82nd Session* (October 2018), par. 4, 5, retrieved at [Portugal_NGO_National Secular Society \(NSS\)_PSWG](#).

¹¹³ Ombudsman of Portugal, *Alternative Report of the Portuguese Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Process of Review of the Fifth and Sixth Periodic Report of Portugal*, p. 15, retrieved at [Portugal_NHRI_Ombudsman_Report_PSWG](#).

¹¹⁴ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Portugal* (9 December 2019), par. 25(c), retrieved at [CRC/C/PRT/CO/5-6](#).



BISHOP'S CONFERENCE OF SLOVAKIA

Profile

Slovakia is a nation with 12 dioceses and eparchies. It relies on the Konferencia biskupov Slovenska as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 4 June 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Commission notes the Conference's strong engagement with the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire. Ten out of twelve dioceses responded to the questionnaire, for a response rate of 83 percent.
- » The Memorare Initiative was adopted in Slovakia, through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commission, the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia, the Conference of Major Superiors in Slovakia, and the Conference of Secular Institutes in Slovakia. This Memorandum of Understanding represents a commitment to the Commission-endorsed One Church approach, facilitating collaboration in safeguarding across the ecclesial community.
- » The KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church has full statutes and members published online.¹¹⁵ The Commission notes that the Chairman is the auxiliary bishop of Košice, Mons. Marek Forgáč, and appreciates his leadership in the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
- » A report titled "Evaluation Report of the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church" was published in March 2024.¹¹⁶ The report brings together a series of activities of the KBS Commission since its creation in 2018. It also provides statistics on cases of sexual abuse by clerics, consecrated persons, and lay people holding office or providing service in the Church, for the period from 1990 to the present.
- » The bishops made a public statement about their discussion during their Plenary Meeting (4–5 March 2024) of the "Evaluation Report of the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church".¹¹⁷
- » There was a full public statement and apology from the President of the Conference to victims/survivors on 5 March 2024.¹¹⁸ The Commission notes that the bishops' public apology is outstanding and deeply consistent with the principles of Conversional Justice.

¹¹⁵ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church*, retrieved at <https://maloleti.kbs.sk/>.

¹¹⁶ Press Office of the Slovak Bishops Conference, *The first Evaluation Report of the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church has been published* (5 March 2024), retrieved at <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20240305009>.

¹¹⁷ Press Office of the Slovak Bishops Conference, *Slovak bishops met at a plenary session in Košice-Loriník* (5 March 2024), retrieved at <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20240305014>.

¹¹⁸ Press Office of the Slovak Bishops Conference, *Statement of the Chairman of the KBS on the report of the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church* (5 March 2024), retrieved at <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20240305010>.

- » The Conference's national safeguarding guidelines are titled "Procedure in cases of sexual abuse by clerics, members of institutes of consecrated life, or societies of apostolic life and any faithful holding an office or service in the Church".¹¹⁹ The Commission notes that the Conference's guidelines are strong. Particular care is taken in the guideline document for the selection of candidates to Holy Orders, where, in addition to vocational discernment, an expert evaluation is foreseen to rule out possible criminal tendencies in the candidate. The Commission notes a reference in the guidelines to Canon 1729 of the Code of Canon Law, which provides for the possibility of victims/survivors to participate in canonical procedures to request compensation from the offender.
- » The Centre for the Protection of Minors (COM) was established on 1 March 2019 as a workplace of the Faculty of Theology in Košice, Catholic University in Ružomberok.¹²⁰ In 2021, in partnership with the Institute of Anthropology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Faculty of Theology in Košice translated a safeguarding formation course into Slovakian to be more accessible. The course includes ten didactic units and nine face-to-face sessions. The Centre is also involved in the ongoing formation of diocesan safeguarding practitioners.
- » The Conference's Code of Pastoral Conduct¹²¹ has Points 19 and 20 that specifically refer to the abuse of children.
- » The Conference's Office for the Protection of Personal Data¹²² has separate binding regulations for the Latin Rite Catholic Church¹²³ and the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia.¹²⁴
- » There are victim accompaniment services in the Diocese of Zilina, in the form of professional psychological and spiritual care.
- » The KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church reportedly takes victims'/survivors' suggestions into consideration on the correct way to handle denunciations.
- » Victims/survivors are invited to participate in safeguarding formation events and media activities to give their testimony, in almost all the dioceses of Slovakia.¹²⁵
- » Catechists in many dioceses receive safeguarding training as part of their regular methodological formation courses.
- » The Catholic television channel TV LUX promoted a video series on child protection, overseen by Mons. Marek Forgáč, President of the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church. The series was aired in October 2023 and is still available in the TV LUX archive.

¹¹⁹ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Procedure in cases of sexual abuse by clerics, members of an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life, and any faithful who hold an office or service in the Church* (11 October 2022), retrieved at <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/konferencia-biskupov-slovenska/p/nahlasenie-zneuzivania/c/smernica-konferencie-biskupov-slovenska-postup-v-pripadoch-sexualneho-zneuzivania-klerikom>.

¹²⁰ Centre for the Protection of Minors, retrieved at <https://ochranamaloletych.sk/>.

¹²¹ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Code of Pastoral Conduct*, retrieved at <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/dokumenty-kbs/c/kodex-pastoracneho-spravania>.

¹²² Slovak Bishops Conference, *Responsible Person*, retrieved at <https://gdpr.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/cirkev/p/zodpovedna-osoba>.

¹²³ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Ensuring the protection of personal data in the Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic*, retrieved at <https://gdpr.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/cirkev/p/zavazne-predpisy-rkc>.

¹²⁴ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Ensuring the protection of personal data in the Greek Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic*, retrieved at <https://gdpr.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/cirkev/p/zavazne-predpisy-gkc-5a>.

¹²⁵ KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church, *Evaluation Report 2018–2023* (March 2024), pp.19–20, retrieved at <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20240305009>.



- » A dedicated reporting desk is a permanent structure of all diocesan curias, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*. These offices are often staffed by lay people to reduce the possible fear of disclosure on the part of victims/survivors, which is a frequent concern in Slovak culture. Reports can be received in person, by phone, or by e-mail.
- » A dedicated reporting website was opened by the Conference with all contact information well published and organised by diocese/eparchy.¹²⁶
- » The bishops have acknowledged that strong policies are also in the best interest of the bishops to navigate and support themselves amidst often very complicated cases.
- » There is safeguarding training at the interdiocesan seminary according to No. 202 of the *Ratio Fundamentalis*. This includes safeguarding training from a psychological, legal, and theological perspective.
- » The bishops' collaborate with lay professionals on safeguarding at the Centre for Psychology and Physiology of Enoia.
- » There are dedicated human resources in many dioceses for the diocesan reporting desks.
- » Adoption by the diocesan bishops of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines and Code of Conduct works to promote a common standard throughout the local Church.
- » There is a Slovak translation of the "*Vademecum* on certain points of procedure in treating cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics".
- » The Conference uses of the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
- » A diocesan circular letter in each of the Conference's dioceses makes the faithful aware of available safeguarding services, particularly the reporting structure in place for victims/survivors and their families.
- » National meetings of Catholic psychologists are regularly organised and collaboration with lay experts is facilitated.
- » Advanced safeguarding courses were offered to seminarians in the Diocese of Nitra and the Archdiocese of Kosice between 2020 and 2023.
- » The bishops are required to complete a questionnaire each year for each case of abuse, which is then submitted to the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church for evaluation and review. It was stressed by the bishops that this serves as a valuable process of self-reflection.
- » A representative of the Conference of Secular Institutes in Slovakia serves on the KBS Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Church. The Commission welcomes news of encouraging tripart dialogue toward a formalised cooperation around safeguarding between the episcopal conference, the Conference of Secular Institutes in Slovakia, and the Conference of Major Superiors in Slovakia.
- » The good practice that 11 out of 12 dioceses' reporting desks are staffed by lay people (9 women, 2 men).

¹²⁶ Slovak Bishops Conference, *Reporting sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church in Slovakia*, retrieved at <https://nahlaseniez-neuzivania.kbs.sk/>.

• Challenges

- » The bishops expressed concerns surrounding victims/survivors' comfort with reporting their cases, given social pressures, taboos, and fear. The Commission separately notes concern about the independence of the victim/survivor accompaniment services, to ensure that victims/survivors feel comfortable accessing them.
- » There is a lack of dedicated and permanently established budgets for safeguarding in the dioceses.
- » There is a "Conference of Major Superiors in Slovakia (K.V.R.P.S.)" and also a "Conference of Secular Institutes in Slovakia (C.I.S.)". However, the different competencies of these two bodies is unclear, which raises concerns about effectively promoting a One Church approach to safeguarding. The bishops acknowledge that cooperation with the religious could improve, specifically regarding safeguarding issues and initiatives.
- » The bishops expressed concern about loose oversight of volunteers in parishes.
- » The bishops raised questions and concerns about the Church's collaboration with civil authorities, especially because victims/survivors often don't want the civil authorities involved in their case.
- » There is an expressed need for civil lawyers to advise on dealing with cases involving the civil prescription limits, especially vis-à-vis the Ministry of the Interior.
- » The bishops raised questions about how to properly manage perpetrators.
- » There is no audit mechanism built into the Conference's safeguarding regime.
- » There is a need, expressed by the bishop of one diocese, to designate a lay woman as the contact person for reporting, instead of a priest, to reduce any possible fear present in Slovak culture.
- » There is a need for more financial resources to compensate lay safeguarding experts interested in contributing to the safeguarding ministry of the local Church.
- » The bishops' expressed hope for a faster procedure at the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding particular cases.
- » Provisions on safeguarding formation are generic and insufficiently articulated in some dioceses.
- » There is a need to develop psychological services outside the perpetrator's home diocese, so that the perpetrator can receive appropriate treatment aimed at the prevention of reoffending, at a distance from the site of the abuse.
- » There are instances of victims/survivors going directly to the ordinaries to report cases, despite the existence of professionally staffed reporting desks, due to a cultural deference for authority figures.

Recommendations

1. There should be a dedicated and stable budget, according to minimum standards, for safeguarding in each diocese.
2. Lay people should be designated as diocesan reporting liaisons whenever possible to reduce any possible fear of reporting on the part of victims/survivors and their communities.
3. Developing and supporting an independent referral system for reporting and victim/survivor accompaniment services would help to further encourage victims/survivors to tell their story. The Commission recommends that the Memorare Initiative in Slovakia be leveraged to prioritise the realisation of such a reporting and victim/survivor accompaniment structure.
4. A meeting between the Conference and the Commission's Regional Group Europe would be helpful to effectively map the potential for a One Church approach to safeguarding in the local Church.
5. There should be stricter requirements in the safeguarding guidelines for volunteers working in the local Church.
6. The national safeguarding guidelines should be updated to better specify the necessary qualifications of the people who are to receive reports in the dioceses. This will further ensure that each diocese has a team of experts capable of receiving complaints in a trauma-informed manner and providing necessary care for victims/survivors.
7. An audit mechanism should be developed and implemented in the Conference's safeguarding regime. The Commission's Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany this initiative.
8. The Centre for the Protection of Minors should be degree-granting and should work to attract students from around the region. The Commission recommends that the Centre share a list of their graduates with the Commission on an ongoing basis.
9. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Slovakia (last reviewed in 2025):

- » The Government of Slovakia reported, "The National Coordination Centre, through the regional coordinators for the protection of children from violence, provides education in a selected, regionally determined topic. In 2018 and 2019, 220 multidisciplinary training activities were implemented to support the professionalism of the performance. In 2018, 2,300 participants from participating entities completed education and in 2019 there were 2,532 participants (Office of the Commissioner for Children, SLPCaSG bodies, SLPCaSG facilities, town and municipal police, police force, healthcare providers, teachers and educators, other pedagogical staff, prosecutors, representatives of municipalities and higher territorial units, district courts, and other non-governmental and church organisations). The topic is mainly the identification of all forms of violence, but also crisis intervention, possibilities of communication with the victim, and communication with the perpetrator or the victim's family".¹²⁷
- » The Government of Slovakia cited "cooperation between the police, schools, municipalities, social-legal protection of children, NGOs, churches, doctors and judges is supported by coordinators for the protection of children from violence".¹²⁸ The Government of Slovakia went on to note, "Research has shown an increase in problems such as cyberbullying, children being exposed to dangerous content, including sexual content, grooming and so on".¹²⁹



MALTESE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

Profile

Malta is a nation with two dioceses. It relies on the Maltese Episcopal Conference as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 24 October 2024.

Safeguarding overview

- » There has been strong and admirable leadership in safeguarding, over a sustained period, by the Archbishop of Malta and the Bishop of Gozo, who have adopted a joint safeguarding policy for the Church in Malta. The Commission thanks both ordinaries for their commitment to justice

¹²⁷ CRC, *Annex 1 to the Sixth Periodic Report of the Slovak Republic on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, par. 82, retrieved at [Annex I to State Party Report](#).

¹²⁸ CRC, *Opening speech by the head of the delegation of the Slovak Republic at the 98th Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child* (13–14 January 2025), pp. 2–3, retrieved at [Opening Statement - Slovakia](#).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

in the Church's response to clerical sexual abuse. The Commission notes that the local Church's safeguarding ministry is deeply consistent with a Conversional Justice approach.

- » The Conference has placed a strong emphasis on a victim-centered approach.
- » The Commission notes the Conference's emphasis on the professionalisation of safeguarding in the local Church, accompanied by the resources necessary to employ safeguarding experts as part of the Conference's ordinary staff. The Conference's Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission is professionally and robustly staffed, with information well published online.¹³⁰ All staff and board members that make up the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission and Secretariat are thoroughly trained safeguarding professionals. This is a good practice.
- » There are separate safeguarding structures in each of the two dioceses in Malta, including a physical premise in both dioceses.
- » The Conference demonstrates a strong financial commitment to safeguarding, including resources for the salary of a junior safeguarding officer (full-time), the salary of a senior safeguarding officer (full-time), the salaries of Safeguarding Advisory Board Members (not full-time), the salary of a safeguarding officer providing victim/survivor accompaniment services (full-time), and the resources to cover the costs of sessions with external psychotherapists and psychiatrists for victims/survivors.
- » The Conference has a robust human resources commitment to safeguarding, including: one safeguarding officer for formation (full-time), eight people who deliver trainings (not full-time), three safeguarding officers for case management (full-time), seven Safeguarding Advisory Board Members (not full-time), one safeguarding officer for victim/survivor accompaniment (full-time), and any external professionals needed in the accompaniment journey (not full-time).
- » The Conference's safeguarding guidelines in the Commission archives ahead of the *ad limina* visit, "On Cases of Sexual Abuse in Pastoral Activity", were from 2014.¹³¹ Those 2014 guidelines did not account for recent changes to Universal law regarding safeguarding. However, during the *ad limina* visit, the Commission was pleased to receive the Conference's updated 2024 guidelines, "Safeguarding policy adopted by the Church in Malta and Gozo". The Commission notes that this document is available online.¹³² Notably, the Conference reports that these new 2024 guidelines were developed in dialogue with victims/survivors. This is a good practice. Upon general review, the Commission sees these guidelines as exemplary and consistent with the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission encourages other episcopal conferences to reference these guidelines, as a good practice.
- » There is a documented whistleblowing policy in the Archdiocese of Malta.¹³³ This is a good practice.

- » There is a General Decree on the Protection of Data in the Archdiocese of Malta.¹³⁴ This is a good practice.
- » The 2024 safeguarding guidelines includes a chapter that outlines a code of conduct (Section III) for the local Church. The Conference stresses that this code of conduct was designed not to inhibit the pastoral work of the Church in Malta but to enhance it by making it safer, and insists it is culturally sensitive. Moreover, the Code of Conduct includes a specific section addressing online behaviour, given its relevance in today's culture. This provision for online abuse is a unique and welcomed practice. The Commission suggests that this practice be shared with other episcopal conferences, as they look to address the rising challenges of online abuse.
- » Contact information for all safeguarding services is well published on both diocesan websites, for the Archdiocese of Malta and the Diocese of Gozo. Moreover, the Conference's Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission website is very informative and accessible.¹³⁵
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission's recommendations to the ordinary on how an alleged perpetrator should be managed during an investigation are based on a risk management assessment.¹³⁶ This risk management approach, which includes provisions around services for the treatment of an alleged perpetrator, is a good practice.¹³⁷
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission provides a publicly accessible form to report a case/concern.¹³⁸
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission has victim/survivor accompaniment services publicly documented online.¹³⁹
- » The Archdiocese of Malta is renovating a dedicated space to serve as a safeguarding "drop-in centre". The architects and interior designers of the new drop-in centre have been informed of the need for this space to be physically welcoming to victims/survivors, which is a good example of a trauma-informed approach — and a good practice.
- » The dedicated Safeguarding Officer (who is a professionally trained psychotherapist) on the Victim Care and Advocacy Team regularly meets with victims/survivors and their families to provide updates on their cases. If a victim/survivor does not want to benefit from the in-house Victim Care and Advocacy Team, the victim/survivor can request reimbursement for any treatment sought externally. The dedicated Safeguarding Officer in the Victim Care and Advocacy Team is a good practice. Regular meetings with victims/survivors and their families are encouraging examples of a victim-centered approach to the canonical process, and a model for victim/survivor accompaniment in the Church. The reimbursement programme in place for victims/survivors who seek external accompaniment services is a good example of the practice of reparations.

¹³⁰ See <https://safeguarding.mt/safeguarding-office/>.

¹³¹ Maltese Ecclesiastical Province, *On cases of sexual abuse in pastoral activity: Statement of policy and procedures in cases of sexual abuse* (November 2014), retrieved at <https://safeguarding.mt/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Church-Statement-of-Policy.pdf>.

¹³² See https://safeguarding.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Safeguarding-Policy-A5_V5.pdf.

¹³³ Archdiocese of Malta, *The Whistleblowing Policy* (April 2022), retrieved at <https://ms.knisja.mt/WEBSITE/The%20Whistleblowing%20Policy.pdf>.

¹³⁴ Archdiocese of Malta, *General Decree on the protection of Data* (12 May 2018), retrieved at <https://ms.knisja.mt/files/page/GDPD.15348463124.pdf>.

¹³⁵ See <https://safeguarding.mt/>.

¹³⁶ See <https://safeguarding.mt/investigation-and-assessment/>.

¹³⁷ See <https://safeguarding.mt/wellbeing-of-subject-of-complaint/>.

¹³⁸ See <https://safeguarding.mt/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Safeguarding-Commission-Referral-Form.pdf>.

¹³⁹ See <https://safeguarding.mt/victim-care-and-advocacy-2/>.

- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission provides Church authorities a form to request background checks from the civil authorities before hiring someone.¹⁴⁰
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission is under the joint auspices of the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. Moreover, the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Major Superiors have jointly enacted the 2024 safeguarding guidelines. These represent foundational elements for a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » The Head of Safeguarding maintains a working relationship with the heads of the various lay groups and regularly meets with the “Forum of the groups and movements of the Catholic lay persons”. This provides an encouraging platform for collaboration around safeguarding.
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission runs regular social media campaigns and public sensitisation campaigns to make their services known to the community.
- » The 2024 safeguarding guidelines include a chapter on case management (Section IV). The Commission notes the meaningful detail and specificity of these protocols.
- » The local Church cooperates closely with civil authorities. Whenever a safeguarding officer receives a report involving a minor under the age of 18, the safeguarding officer must promptly inform the civil authorities of the *notitia criminis*. Moreover, the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission is in regular contact with the civil authorities, including the Malta Police Force, the Child Protection Directorate, and other relevant statutory agencies. The Conference plans to review the new 2024 safeguarding policies with the Malta Police Force, which in turn will seek input from the Attorney General of Malta. This is a good practice.
- » The Conference cites six different channels for reporting a case to the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission, which is highly consistent with the provision on accessibility stipulated in *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission advertises its formation opportunities online.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission keeps an online and public record of the formation events it holds.¹⁴²
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission has developed child-friendly pedagogical materials, for free usage.¹⁴³ This is a good practice.
- » Every person in formation (seminary or convent) is required by the 2024 safeguarding guidelines to attend a generic safeguarding course, offered by the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission in collaboration with the Pastoral Formation Institute.
- » The Conference reports that specialised training is being developed for ordinaries; seminarians or religious in their fourth year of formation; those working with minors in Catholic schools; those working with minors in residential care; and those working with minors with disabilities.

- » All clergy and all those working with minors are mandated by the 2024 safeguarding guidelines to attend a generic safeguarding course every three years for ongoing formation, offered by the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission in collaboration with the Pastoral Formation Institute.
- » The Safeguarding Review Board provides an accountability and verification mechanism for the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission. Its remit is triggered when an ordinary sees the need for a review of the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission's recommendations.¹⁴⁴ This represents a meaningful audit function with regard to the Conference's case management system.
- » Every Church entity is required to have a designated safeguarding officer who is someone other than the leader of that specific Church entity.
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission formally publishes Annual Reports.¹⁴⁵ This is a meaningful exercise of accountability and transparency, consistent with the synodal Church.¹⁴⁶
- » The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission disseminates a template to each parish to facilitate the required reporting exercise for each parish's safeguarding structures. This is a good practice.
- » The local Church is committed to various practices of reparations, consistent with Conversional Justice. The Victim Care and Advocacy Team shares its commitment to a holistic approach to reparations that extends beyond financial compensation to include pastoral, psychological, and practical assistance. The Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission emphasises its ongoing survivor consultation process, which seeks to engage individuals in shaping the Church's approach to justice and healing. This process recognises the importance of survivor-led insight in addressing the harm caused, fostering transparency, and ensuring accountability. The Commission notes this example of victims/survivors contributing to Church policy as an encouraging practice of reparations. The Conference also shared its understanding of institutional reform and non-recurrence as forms of reparations. The Commission notes that this understanding is consistent with the interconnectedness of the Conversional Justice pillars. The Commission thanks the Conference for sharing these examples.

• Challenges

- » The bishops expressed concern regarding the definition of a vulnerable adult. The Commission notes interest in the bishops' suggestion of a comparative study between the understanding of vulnerable adults in canon law versus international law. The Commission also notes the bishops' expressed collegiality and openness to learn from the Eastern Catholic Churches on the topic of vulnerability, especially as far as the relationship between a priest and another adult is concerned.
- » The bishops expressed concern about criminal record checks of workers/pastoral agents arriving from abroad. Currently, Church authorities are only able to conduct background checks of people since they started living in Malta. Church authorities do not currently have a way of producing a background check from the country of origin.

¹⁴⁰ See <https://safeguarding.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Court-Application-SG.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ See <https://safeguarding.mt/prevention-and-training/>.

¹⁴² See <https://safeguarding.mt/training-and-lectures/>.

¹⁴³ See <https://safeguarding.mt/educational-posts/>.

¹⁴⁴ See <https://srb.mt/#:~:text=The%20Safeguarding%20Review%20Board%20reviews%20the%20facts%20of,Safeguarding%20Commission%20or%20whether%20to%20amend%20the%20same>.

¹⁴⁵ See <https://safeguarding.mt/annual-reports/>.

¹⁴⁶ HOLY SEE, “*Instrumentum laboris*” for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024), par. 75–76, retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html>.

- » The bishops expressed concern about the complexity of engaging with lay movements on safeguarding issues and acknowledged that they sometimes struggle to understand the canonical norms to be applied.
- » The Commission notes the challenge of vetting all Church personnel, due to the large number of people. The Conference has made this task the main responsibility of the Junior Safeguarding Officer.
- » Ensuring that Church volunteers, amounting to thousands of people, abide by the new 2024 safeguarding guidelines is an ongoing challenge.
- » The bishops expressed concern about resistance to safeguarding, especially among the religious communities.
- » The bishops expressed the need to fight cultural taboos and the culture of silence, especially on small islands where communities are very insular.
- » The bishops report that for cases occurring within a religious order, the religious superior sometimes requests that the ordinary forgo dealing with the case through the Interdiocesan Safeguarding Commission and that it be dealt with instead through the local religious superior or directly with the order's generalate in Rome.
- » The Commission does not note the presence of an external audit within the Conference's safeguarding provisions. The Commission notes the lack of safeguarding structures and experience outside of the Church in Malta, which makes it challenging to identify qualified individuals to conduct an external audit.

Recommendations

1. The Commission welcomes and encourages the bishops' continued solidarity with the Commission's mission, and hopes to collaborate further with them as a sign of collegiality and communion for the Universal Church. The Commission notes the Conference's openness to an in-person meeting to discuss specific ways of formalising a collaboration.
2. The Commission recommends that the Conference engage with the Commission in a comprehensive review of the new 2024 safeguarding guidelines, in light of the Conference's expressed intent to issue finalised guidelines in 2026. The Commission is available for a prompt commencement of this joint review.
3. The Commission recommends that the Conference engage directly with the Commission's Regional Group Europe to further discuss overcoming the challenge of incomplete background checks for workers/pastoral agents arriving from abroad. The Commission welcomes the Conference's openness to this engagement.

4. The Commission recommends that the Conference engage in an ongoing dialogue with the Commission as it continues to study safeguarding issues in lay movements in conversation with the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. The Commission welcomes the Conference's openness to this engagement, especially considering its current and developing engagements with lay groups in the local Church.
5. The Commission recommends a robust and comprehensive dissemination and sensitisation campaign regarding the new 2024 safeguarding guidelines. This campaign should especially target lay volunteers, workers, and pastoral agents. The Commission welcomes the Conference's plans for eight sensitisation campaigns in 2025.
6. The Commission recommends that the Conference publish a timeline for the anticipated rollout of the specialised formation curricula under development. The Commission welcomes the Conference's plans for four targeted safeguarding courses in 2025 and four targeted safeguarding courses in 2026.
7. The Commission kindly requests copies of the curricula that the Conference develops for specialised training courses for various targeted groups, as they are completed. The Commission thanks the Conference for sharing a first set of customised curricula, including a targeted safeguarding course for ordinaries and major superiors. The Commission notes this as a particularly interesting curriculum that it would like to explore further, in the hope of sharing it with other episcopal conferences.
8. The Commission welcomes the Conference's commitment to the development and implementation of an external audit mechanism as part of the local Church's ordinary safeguarding apparatus and as recommended by the Commission.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Malta (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of Malta reported 47 cases of sexual abuse in 2016; 28 cases in 2015; 21 cases in 2014; and 15 cases in 2013.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ CRC, *Replies to the list of issues in relation to the combined third to sixth periodic reports of Malta*, Annex, par. 27(c), retrieved at [Malta_Annex to State party report](#).

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about “cases of sexual abuse of children committed within their family and/or by persons in their circle of trust, including by religious personnel of the Catholic Church”.¹⁴⁸
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended “an independent and impartial commission of inquiry to examine cases of sexual abuse reportedly committed by the religious personnel of the Catholic Church, and ensure the criminal prosecution of alleged perpetrators, and the adequate criminal punishment of those found guilty”.¹⁴⁹



• Safeguarding overview

- » The 15 applicable dioceses had a 100 percent response rate to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire ahead of the Conference's *ad limina* visit. This is a meaningful demonstration of the bishops' commitment to a reflection on and evaluation of the local Church's safeguarding ministry. The Commission thanks the Conference for its engagement on this important data collection exercise and highlights the South Korean bishops' commitment as an example for the College of Bishops worldwide.
- » The Diocese of Jeonju cites a dedicated fund for both the safeguarding education of clergy and the care of victims/survivors. The Diocese similarly reports one person dedicated to prevention and another to the care and treatment of victims.
- » There are personnel dedicated to safeguarding in 7 out of the 15 dioceses. The remaining dioceses report allocating personnel as needed. Another diocese reports to be in the process of identifying a dedicated staffer. This is a good practice.
- » H.E. Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, is emeritus Bishop of Daejeon and has been a strong supporter of safeguarding in his leadership at the Dicastery for the Clergy, through a structured collaboration with the Commission. The Commission thanks Cardinal You for his commitment to the Church's safeguarding ministry.

¹⁴⁸ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined third to sixth periodic reports of Malta* (26 June 2019), par. 27, retrieved at [CRC/C/MLT/CO/3-6](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/crc/crc/MLT/CO/3-6).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., par. 27(e).

- » The bishops acknowledge the value of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
- » The bishops emphasised the need to move from guidelines alone to the development of an integral culture of safeguarding.
- » The bishops explained that they have no reported cases but that it is nonetheless high time to address this issue proactively. This demonstrates an important commitment, acknowledgement, and example, consistent with Conversional Justice.
- » A national safeguarding guideline document was published in 2014, “Guidelines for dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors perpetrated by clerics in Korea”. The Apostolic Nuncio notes this as an effort to promote structured action at the national level.
- » The national safeguarding guidelines provide for formation of the entire ecclesial community, and the bishops demonstrate a commitment to share this risk-management approach to the broader society.
- » The national safeguarding guidelines provide for a national commission to handle cases. This same provision mandates that each diocese have an office dedicated to receiving complaints and providing necessary care to victims/survivors, which works toward compliance with the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*. The Commission notes that 11 out of 15 dioceses cite stable diocesan reporting structures. Another diocese is currently developing a reporting structure. The bishops report that certain dioceses have established phone numbers dedicated to receiving complaints.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 11 have their own diocesan safeguarding guidelines. Another diocese is currently developing one.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 6 have a code of conduct currently in place. Another 2 dioceses are currently developing one.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 6 cite case management provisions, especially regarding managing the alleged perpetrator. The Conference reports to be in the process of developing a case management protocol for the local Church that is consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » The Diocese of Incheon reports that in order to enter the diocesan seminary, a criminal record check is compulsory. The same is reportedly required under civil law for all diocesan employees. This is a good practice.
- » The Diocese of Andong reports that candidates for the priesthood are screened by the diocesan council. For each candidate, there is a month-long consultation at the parish of origin, in which the parishioners are listened to regarding the candidate and his vision of ministry. During the same period, the seminary conducts a multidisciplinary study on each candidate. This process of soliciting the parishioners' perspective for candidates to Holy Orders is a good practice to be replicated across the dioceses. It is consistent with the synodal Church, which calls for transparency and accountability.¹⁵⁰
- » The Archdiocese of Daegu describes the presence of a counselling centre for victims/survivors of sexual abuse. This is a good practice.

¹⁵⁰ HOLY SEE, “*Instrumentum laboris*” (October 2024), N. 75–76, retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html>.

- » The Diocese of Jeju specifically mentions victims'/survivors' rights to reparations, including compensation and also a commitment to care for victims/survivors and a journey of reconciliation through continuous dialogue. This demonstrates an encouraging sensitivity to reparations, an important pillar of Conversional Justice.
- » Diocesan special committees reportedly provide victims/survivors with psychological counselling, legal assistance, and spiritual care. The committees also run specialised facilities for the protection of victims/survivors and, if necessary, cooperate with civil authorities or other social welfare facilities. This is a good practice.
- » The Diocese of Suwon reports good collaboration between the diocesan bishop and the religious. Moreover, the bishop requires all religious orders and lay movements in the diocese to train their members in safeguarding. All religious orders must follow the diocesan guidelines.
- » The Diocese of Wonju reports religious sisters ministering alongside parents on issues of child protection. This is an encouraging collaboration on safeguarding issues within the ecclesial community.
- » The bishops report to be actively trying to promote a culture of safeguarding in collaboration with the clergy, religious, and the whole ecclesial community. This is consistent with a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » The Diocese of Chuncheon reports that Suwon Catholic University provides safeguarding training once a year.
- » The Diocese of Jeju reports that seminarians are given appropriate sexual education, in order to live a healthy life in celibacy.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 12 ensure initial safeguarding formation for seminarians. The Apostolic Nunciature shared appreciation for this robust initial formation. The Diocese of Cheongju stands out by reportedly offering 60 hours of safeguarding formation to seminarians. The Diocese of Jeonju also stands out by offering ten meetings per year on safeguarding for seminarians.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 12 ensure ongoing safeguarding formation for clergy. Another diocese reports to currently be developing a safeguarding formation curriculum.
- » Out of 15 dioceses, 11 ensure ongoing safeguarding formation for lay employees/pastoral agents. Another diocese reports to currently be developing a safeguarding formation curriculum.
- » The Catholic Church in Korea publishes annual statistics.¹⁵¹ This is a good practice that demonstrates an encouraging data collection infrastructure, relevant for safeguarding.
- » The Diocese of Wonju reports that the Prevention Committee, composed of subject matter experts, has been designated as an auditor for the verification of structures, standards, procedures, policies, and resources.
- » The Apostolic Nuncio notes a growing culture of transparency in South Korean society regarding reporting cases of abuse and prevention.

¹⁵¹ See <https://www.cbck.or.kr/en/CatholicChurchInKorea/Statistics>.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes that only 2 out of 15 dioceses have a dedicated safeguarding budget. The remaining dioceses report to allocate money as needed, or did not report on the matter.
- » The Commission notes the Conference's expressed need for the Commission's accompaniment with the integration of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*, sharing other episcopal conference's guidelines, and guidance on case management. The Commission stands ready to accompany the Conference through its Regional Group Asia/Oceania.
- » The Commission notes that the national safeguarding guidelines from 2014 need an updating to reflect recent changes in Universal law.
- » The Commission notes that one bishop does not see the need for safeguarding guidelines or a code of conduct due to a lack of cases. The Commission cautions that a lack of reported cases does not necessarily signify an absence of abuse, and expresses concern about any resistance to preventive safeguarding measures from a Church leader, especially given the relevant canonical obligations of all ordinaries.
- » The bishops expressed concerns about the challenge of inculturating the safeguarding guidelines in the local Church.
- » The Diocese of Chuncheon cites challenges with finding local safeguarding experts.
- » Only 2 out of 15 dioceses explicitly mention a victim/survivor assistance structure.
- » While 11 out of 15 dioceses report to have stable diocesan reporting structures, only 6 dioceses currently have evidence of a reporting centre published on their website, with relevant contact information.
- » Only 4 out of 15 dioceses cite collaboration with the religious on safeguarding.
- » The Dioceses of Chuncheon, Daejeon, and Cheongju cite the expansion of online child abuse material with the development of the internet. The bishops similarly cite a rise in cyber-bullying affecting the People of God in South Korea. The Apostolic Nuncio notes this rising risk factor as well.
- » Civil legislation in South Korea sets the age of consent at 19 years old, despite canon law's provision of majority at 18 years old.
- » The Diocese of Chuncheon reports that the permanent formation of clergy does not provide anything specific on safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes only one diocese with an audit mechanism in place, and one other diocese reportedly in the process of developing one.
- » The Commission notes concern around abuses of power in South Korean society, enabled by cultural norms that make it challenging to hold perpetrators accountable if they are in positions of authority.
- » The Commission notes the Apostolic Nuncio's observation that there remains a limited number of safeguarding experts in the local Church.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends a dedicated safeguarding budget in each diocese.
2. The Commission recommends that the Conference establish direct contact with the Commission's Regional Group Asia/Oceania to discuss next steps for an accompaniment as the Conference requested during its *ad limina* visit. This accompaniment would particularly include a review and updating of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines.
3. The Commission recommends the Conference's development of a robust safeguarding policy ahead of World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul. The Regional Group Asia/Oceania stands ready to accompany this important initiative, drawing on experiences and learnings from prior World Youth Days around the world.
4. Although 11 out of 15 dioceses have their own diocesan safeguarding guidelines and another reports to be currently developing one, the Commission recommends a study at the Conference level of the extent to which individual and disaggregated diocesan safeguarding guidelines might represent a challenge to the effective and efficient promotion of a culture of safeguarding.
5. The Diocese of Chuncheon reports a "Youth Foundation" that holds training sessions for youth in the diocese twice a year. The Commission recommends that these training sessions include a safeguarding module.
6. The Commission recommends the development of robust victim/survivor accompaniment services across the dioceses.
7. The Commission recommends the online publication of relevant contact information for the respective diocesan reporting structures, to ensure accessibility for the public.
8. The Commission stresses the importance of collaboration on safeguarding concerns among the dioceses and religious congregations ministering in the local Church. The Commission recommends the One Church approach, with specific structural provisions established to facilitate ongoing collaboration around safeguarding.
9. The Commission recommends direct dialogue between the Conference and the Commission's specialised personnel when the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on Online Abuse. The Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the risks and possibilities of the digital world.
10. The Commission recommends the swift completion and publication of a Conference-wide case management protocol that is reportedly in the drafting phase. The Commission recommends that the Conference share an estimated completion date for this document.

11. The Commission requests more information on the safeguarding instructors and safeguarding curriculum at Suwom Catholic University. The Commission recommends dialogue between the Regional Group Asia/Oceania, the Conference, and the leadership of Suwom Catholic University to see how the Commission might support the expansion of Suwom Catholic University's safeguarding formation opportunities to other countries in the region. This would work toward a regional academic formation programme, consistent with the need expressed in the Commission's pilot Annual Report (for reporting period 2023) for more safeguarding experts in the local Church. The Commission recommends that Suwom Catholic University be leveraged to promote wider professional opportunities for future safeguarding practitioners.
12. The Commission recommends the development and implementation of an external audit mechanism as a permanent part of the Conference's safeguarding regime. The Regional Group Asia/Oceania stands ready to accompany this initiative.
13. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of South Korea (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of South Korea reported (redundant cases not counted separately) 744 cases of child sexual abuse in 2016; 629 cases in 2015; 447 cases in 2014; and 380 cases in 2013.¹⁵²
- » The Government of South Korea reported 423 cases of sexual intercourse and sexual harassment by hierarchical abuse of power in 2016; 480 cases in 2017; and 424 cases in 2018.¹⁵³
- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) noted concerns about the potential underreporting of cases of clerical sexual abuse.¹⁵⁴
- » The Korea NPO Coalition for UNCRC (civil society organisation) noted, "The management of investigations, treatment, counselling, and legal support, etc. remains divided across different areas, hindering the response for victims/survivors of sexual violence. Victims/survivors may

¹⁵² CRC, *Annex to the fifth and sixth periodic reports submitted under the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (2017), Table V-8, retrieved at [Korea_Annex to the 5th and 6th periodic report](#).

¹⁵³ CRC, *Annex to the replies to the list of issues in relation to the fifth and sixth periodic reports* (2019), Table 14, retrieved at [Republic of Korea_Annex to reply to list of issues](#).

¹⁵⁴ National Secular Society, *Alternative Report on Republic of Korea prepared by the (UK) National Secular Society for the 82nd session* (October 2018), par. 4, 6, 22, retrieved at [Korea_NGO_National Secular Society \(NSS\)_PSWG](#).

be subject to interactions and conditions during treatment, investigation, and counselling that results in secondary harm.¹⁵⁵

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern that “sexual violence and abuse remain prevalent and that there has been a surge in online child prostitution and grooming and in sexual harassment by teachers”.¹⁵⁶



EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MOZAMBIQUE

Profile

Mozambique is a nation with 12 dioceses. It relies on the Conferência Episcopal de Moçambique as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 27 September 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » H.E. Mons. Tonito José Francisco Xavier Muananoua and H.E. Mons. Lúcio Andrice Muandula are the Conference’s bishop-delegates for safeguarding.
- » A historical analysis of the national guidelines reveals a sustained commitment to safeguarding. The Conference has published four editions of their national safeguarding guidelines. The most recent version was published in 2022: “Directrizes pastorais sobre a protecao de menores e pessoas vulneraveis contra abusos sexuais”. This document is a comprehensive and well-structured text in six parts. Notably, the procedure for receiving and handling complaints in the safeguarding guidelines is well outlined. This document went into effect in July 2022 in all the dioceses of the Conference.
- » After the Directives were published, five representatives from each diocese — one priest, one religious woman, and three lay people (including one jurist) — convened for two days for a sensitisation course on the Directives. One bishop reports that the safeguarding guidelines have been made known to all clergy in his diocese, pastoral agents in the diocesan Caritas, and teachers in the Catholic schools. The Conference-wide sensitisation on the safeguarding Directives is a good practice.

¹⁵⁵ Korea NPO Coalition for UNCRC, *Republic of Korea Alternative Report to the Government’s 5th and 6th Periodic Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1 November 2018), par. 126, retrieved at [Korea_NGO_NPO_Coalition UNCRC_PSWG](#).

¹⁵⁶ CRC, *Concluding observations on the fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Republic of Korea* (24 October 2019), par. 28(a), retrieved at [CRC/C/KOR/CO/5-6](#).

- » A prior edition of the national Directives was accompanied by a three-day sensitisation course, held in Maputo from 24–27 November 2020. This course was also attended by representatives from all the dioceses.
- » The bishops cite a National Commission for the Protection of Minors composed of four canonists, one civil jurist, and one Biblicist. This Commission is tasked with developing pastoral directives, and it is also represented by two bishops. The Commission welcomes the establishment of this National Commission, and invites direct collaboration with the Commission, especially facilitated by the leadership of the bishop-delegates.
- » The bishops cite that some dioceses have developed a code of conduct based on the Conference guidelines. This is reported to be a guiding tool for pastoral agents and includes not only the dimension of child abuse but also the abuse of power.
- » The second and third parts of the national safeguarding Directives are dedicated respectively to canon law and Mozambican civil law, providing operational guidelines for compliance with both. The bishops have expressed their commitment to act in accordance with existing civil law in Mozambique as it pertains to any cases of abuse. This is a good practice.
- » The fourth part of the national safeguarding Directives addresses communication management and its importance. This is a good practice.
- » The sixth part of the national safeguarding Directives deals with the selection and formation of future priests. This is a good practice.
- » The Diocese of Gurue has a pastoral priority: “A Church that is capable of prophecy and denunciation alongside a people often oppressed by injustice and abuse”. The Commission notes that this pastoral priority is a powerful message and alludes to the evangelising power of safeguarding.
- » Many dioceses have existing infrastructure to host safeguarding formation.
- » The Conference participated in a safeguarding workshop in 2024, hosted by the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA).
- » The Commission especially notes the Apostolic Nuncio’s encouraging engagements with the Conferência dos Institutos Religiosos de Moçambique (CIRMO) on issues of safeguarding.

• Challenges

- » The Commission did not receive any responses to its safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire from the Conference.
- » The Commission notes the need for better definitions of minors and vulnerable adults in the current safeguarding guidelines. The definition of a “minor” in the text refers to persons under the age of 21, while in Canon Law an offense occurs when the illicit act is committed with a person under the age of 18, regardless of the civil legislation’s age of majority. The definition of “vulnerable adult” in the text is equated with someone who habitually has an imperfect use of reason. This statement is no longer reflective of the Universal Law in force, considering recent updates.



- » The fifth part of the national safeguarding Directives covers pastoral care and prescribes methods for accompanying victims, their families, and the ecclesial community. While this shows the Conference's attention to the issue, the Commission notes that it is unclear which structures implement these provisions.
- » The Conference acknowledges that not all dioceses have made continuous progress in the implementation of the national Directives.
- » The Commission notes many lay associations ministering in the local Church, although it is unclear if the Conference's safeguarding regime integrates them into safeguarding formation provisions and reporting systems.
- » The Commission notes the political-military violence in the Cabo Delgado region, which renders populations especially vulnerable and exacerbates the risks of abuse.
- » In light of the use of various local languages in the territory, the Commission notes the need to ensure that safeguarding material is translated into local languages that are accessible to the People of God in the local Church.
- » The Archdiocese of Maputo emphasises the increasing challenge of artificial intelligence, including with regard to abuse.
- » The bishops report that cultural taboos make talking about sexual abuse very difficult in the country.
- » One bishop noted that the abuse of power is certainly present in the local Church and that there are several cases of priests who have taken advantage of their authority.
- » The bishops raised questions about the definition of vulnerability and the abuse of power, including whether the mere act of soliciting sexual acts from someone under one's authority amounts to abuse.
- » The Commission notes no explicit reference in the national safeguarding Directives to a victim's/survivor's right to participate in canonical proceedings and to request compensation from the accused, as per Canon 1729.
- » The Commission is not sufficiently confident in the stability, practical functioning, and accessibility of the "National Commission for the Protection of Minors" or the diocesan reporting structures.
- » The Commission notes the lack of an audit mechanism in the Conference's safeguarding regime.
- » The Conference's financial challenges limit its ability to implement a robust safeguarding regime. As an example, the bishops had made plans for a November 2024 meeting of representatives from each diocesan safeguarding commission to further study and disseminate the safeguarding Directives. However, the meeting was postponed due to a lack of sufficient funding.

Recommendations

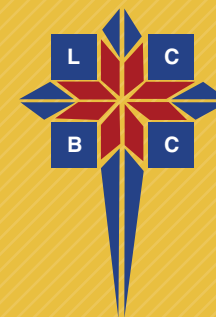
1. The Commission recommends that the bishops reply to the Commission's safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire as soon as possible.
2. The bishops committed to integrating the Commission's safeguarding guidance into their policies. The Commission recommends the *Universal Guidelines Framework* as the document to guide this integration and remains available to accompany this revision. The Commission notes that the next meeting of the representatives from each diocesan safeguarding commission is an important opportunity to plan this review process.
3. The Commission recommends the publication and dissemination of information regarding the full scope and composition of the Conference's "National Commission for the Protection of Minors".
4. The Commission strongly recommends the Conference's adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Mozambique, as a way of ensuring the robust implementation of the safeguarding Directives, and further recommends that this adoption be in partnership with the Conferência dos Institutos Religiosos de Moçambique (CIRMO), consistent with a One Church approach to safeguarding. The Commission is encouraged by the viability of such a partnership, given the Apostolic Nuncio's recent engagements with CIRMO around safeguarding issues. The Commission especially recommends that the Memorare Initiative work toward stable structures to implement the victim/survivor accompaniment services that are provided for in the fifth part of the Conference's safeguarding Directives. The Commission welcomes the Conference's openness to the realisation of the Memorare Initiative in the local Church and recommends the Conference's direct dialogue with Commission's Regional Group Africa, to discuss next steps toward its adoption.
5. The Commission requests copies of the diocesan codes of conduct.
6. The Commission notes robust youth ministries and formation opportunities and recommends the inclusion of specific modules dedicated to safeguarding.
7. The Commission recommends that the fourth part of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines, which addresses communication management, ensure a victim-centered and trauma-informed communications strategy.
8. The Archdiocese of Beira has an "inter-congregational postulancy" where candidates of both sexes from the various religious congregations in the territory can learn subjects specific to their stage. The Archdiocese of Beira also hosts meetings of pastoral workers, held bi-monthly, where priests, religious men and women, and the bishop can reflect on various pastoral themes, programming, and ongoing formation. The Commission recommends that the Archdiocese of Beira leverage this "inter-congregation postulancy" and these bi-monthly meetings to include safeguarding formation that will promote a One Church approach to safeguarding.

9. The Commission notes a Code of Conduct for Pastoral Agents in the Archdiocese of Beira, which was prepared with a synodal methodology. The code of conduct is accompanied by a Declaration of Adhesion to the Pastoral Code of Conduct. The Commission welcomes the news that H.E. Mons. Claudia Dalla Zuanna, S.C.I., Archbishop of Beira, has made these documents available to other dioceses, to share good practices across the Conference.
10. The Conference should ensure that lay associations participate in the safeguarding regime in the local Church.
11. The Commission recommends direct dialogue between the Conference and the Commission's specialised personnel after the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on On-line Abuse. The Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the risks and possibilities of the digital world.
12. The Commission similarly recommends direct dialogue between the Conference and the Commission's specialised personnel after the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on Vulnerability. The Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the concept of vulnerability and the abuse of power.
13. The Bishop of Tete meets twice a year with missionary priests ministering in his diocese. The Commission recommends a regular discussion of safeguarding as part of these meetings.
14. The Commission recommends thorough safeguarding background checks and vetting for missionary priests and religious that are sent for ministry in the local Church.
15. The Commission recommends the development and implementation of an external audit mechanism, as part of the ordinary safeguarding regime, in the local Church. The Regional Group Africa stands ready to accompany this initiative.
16. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Mozambique (last reviewed in 2019):

- » The Government of Mozambique reported 447 child victims of sexual abuse in 2009; 908 in 2010; 815 in 2011; 458 in 2012; 510 in 2013; 650 in 2014; 761 in 2015; and 803 in 2016.¹⁵⁷
- » The Government of Mozambique specified, "Under article 22 [of the Law revising the Penal Code], aggravating factors that increase the penalties mentioned in the above paragraphs are when the agent of the crime is a parent, grandparent, adopter or brother of the victim, the tutor or trustee or exercises any form of authority over the or when the agent is the domestic servant of the victim or her family or when, because of his profession he has influence over the victim ..."¹⁵⁸
- » The Government of Mozambique reported, "In order to strengthen actions of prevention and combat, and to assist the victims, capacity building actions have been held for policemen, immigration officials, judges, attorneys, social welfare staff, staff of civil society organisations and community, traditional and religious leaders".¹⁵⁹
- » The National Secular Society (civil society organisation) cited some "evidence of clerical abuse in the state party (shown in the Appendix)",¹⁶⁰ along with concerns about the potential underreporting of cases of clerical sexual abuse.¹⁶¹



LESOTHO CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE

Profile

Lesotho is a nation with four dioceses. It relies on the Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 5 November 2024.

Safeguarding overview

- » The bishops expressed the Conference's strong commitment to safeguarding during their *ad limina* visit. Notably, the bishops framed safeguarding as something rooted in the gospel. The understanding and framing of safeguarding through gospel teachings are deeply consistent with Conversional Justice.

¹⁵⁷ CRC, *Combined third and fourth periodic reports submitted by Mozambique under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (21 November 2018), par. 184, Table 3, retrieved at [CRC/C/MOZ/3-4](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/c/moz/3-4).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., par. 391.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., par. 400.

¹⁶⁰ NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY, *Alternative Report on Mozambique prepared by the (UK) National Secular Society for the 82nd session* (October 2018), par. 6, retrieved at [Mozambique_NGO_National Secular Society \(NSS\)_PSWG](https://www.mozambique-ngo.org.uk/national-secular-society/nss_pswg).

¹⁶¹ Ibid., par. 4, 11, 23.

- » The most recent safeguarding guidelines were published in 2016: “Lesotho Catholic Bishops’ Conference guidelines for dealing with cases of Child sexual abuse perpetrated by clerics”. The Commission notes that each of the Conference’s departments is developing its own safeguarding policies, based on this document and according to their competency.
- » A committee has been established for the handling of cases of sexual abuse against a minor or vulnerable adult. Membership of this committee is composed of the Conference’s Heads of Departments.
- » There is a separate document addressed to Church personnel in the Commission archive: “Lesotho Catholic Bishops’ Conference guidelines for dealing with cases of Child abuse perpetrated by Church personnel”.
- » The Conference, through the Justice and Peace Department, conducts advocacy and empowerment activities for women’s and children’s rights.
- » The Archdiocese of Maseru reports a Women and Youth Desk.
- » The Conference reports to have adopted a dedicated Policy for the Protection of Minors and the Vulnerable in the school environment. This is a good practice.
- » The bishops report that safeguarding formation courses for Catholic schoolteachers were also attended by secular/public schoolteachers. This is an encouraging paradigm and highlights the potential of the local Church’s leadership role in safeguarding throughout the broader society.
- » The Archdiocese of Maseru reports that the Justice and Peace Commission has mounted a strong advocacy campaign against exploitation.
- » The Diocese of Leribe reports a diocesan tribunal composed of canonists, priests, and members of the laity with legal expertise. This diverse composition of the diocesan tribunal is a good practice.
- » The Archdiocese of Maseru notes an archdiocesan tribunal.
- » The bishops cite a 24/7 WhatsApp hotline for people to report any case of abuse.

• Challenges

- » The bishops have observed resistance from some of the clergy regarding the reporting of cases.
- » The bishops cite a lack of awareness and knowledge of safeguarding issues in the broader society, which might be contributing to a lack of reporting.
- » The bishops report that they have not received the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
- » The bishops’ report that their biggest challenge is in bringing the safeguarding guidelines to life rather than just having them remain dormant on paper.
- » Although the 2016 text received a *nihil obstat* from the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it is no longer up-to-date, given recent changes in Universal Law, especially in the revised version of Book VI of Canon Law and *Vos estis lux mundi*. Notably, it lacks clarity about the procedures for receiving complaints, the care that should be provided to victims/survivors or whistleblowers, and the rights of the parties involved.
- » The local Church reports financial constraints that restrict the robust functioning of the safeguarding apparatus.

- » The Conference reports geographical challenges that hinder outreach services to communities with safeguarding concerns.
- » The bishops report that murder, physical assault, and sexual assault of women by their intimate partners in Lesotho have become rampant — with announcements of these cases made weekly by the police.
- » The Diocese of Qacha’s Nek relies on the tribunal at the national level.
- » The Diocese of Mohale Hoek reports a lack of special schools in the diocese for the formation of catechists and Catholic schoolteachers.
- » The bishops report that safeguarding is not a structured part of seminary formation.
- » The Commission notes the lack of archives in the Diocese of Leribe.
- » The Commission notes that the Conference’s website does not seem to be functioning.

Recommendations

1. The Commission invites the Conference to review the provisory text of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission then recommends that the Conference establish contact with Regional Group Africa to discuss this document’s application to the local Church in Lesotho.
2. The Commission recommends that the Conference develop and publish statutes for the newly established committee for the management of cases of sexual abuse against minors and vulnerable adults. These statutes should include requirements for safeguarding formation, especially in promotion of a victim-centered approach to case management.
3. The Commission requests more information on the scope and personnel of the Justice and Peace Department in its promotion of women and children’s rights, particularly regarding the Justice and Peace Department’s efforts in safeguarding.
4. The Commission requests more information on the scope and personnel of the Women and Youth Desk in the Archdiocese of Maseru. The Commission recommends that the Archdiocese publish information about the Women and Youth Desk on the archdiocesan website.
5. The Commission recommends the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Lesotho and welcomes the Conference’s openness to this proposal. The Memorare Initiative might particularly accompany the implementation of the safeguarding guidelines. It could also provide additional financial and human resources for the promotion of a culture of safeguarding, as well as allowing the pooling of resources to ensure adequate canonical responses to allegations — especially in dioceses without their own robust juridical infrastructure. Finally, it might help address the lack of infrastructure in some dioceses to host safeguarding training courses in the local Church.
6. The Commission recommends a comprehensive review of the Conference’s safeguarding guidelines and welcomes the Conference’s openness to this review. The Regional Group Africa stands ready to accompany this process.

7. The Commission notes a Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Officer who was appointed at the beginning of 2023 in Lesotho. The Commission recommends that this Liaison Officer explore a collaboration with the civil authorities around safeguarding. The Commission further notes that the Catholic Church operates most health and educational institutions in Lesotho, and is in partnership with the government for their functioning. The Commission recommends that this partnership include collaboration around safeguarding.
8. The Commission notes the Diocese of Qacha's Nek's challenges with the implementation of the diocesan strategic plan. The Commission recommends that safeguarding be included in a revised version of the strategic plan, and a commitment be made to its implementation. The Regional Group Africa stands ready to accompany this initiative.
9. The Commission stresses the importance of keeping scrupulous archives — especially as a safeguarding concern, but also as a commitment to transparency and accountability as the Synod on Synodality requested.¹⁶²
10. The Archdiocese of Maseru has a pastoral strategic plan that is reviewed every five years. The Commission recommends that safeguarding be included in a revised version of the strategic plan.
11. The bishops report an *ad hoc* Management and Evaluation Committee at the Conference level. The Commission recommends that this committee be made permanent and be tasked with evaluating the safeguarding apparatus in the local Church on a systematic basis.
12. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with reparations. The Commission's study of Conversional Justice emphasises the broad range of practices included in the concept of reparations, beyond the provision of financial damages. The Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church, to supplement the Commission's ongoing study across the Universal Church.

• Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Lesotho (last reviewed in 2018):

- » The Government of Lesotho reported, "Radio programmes sensitising the nation about human rights issues on topics that were dealt with in the human rights awareness campaign were held in 2009 in the local radio stations that have included Mo-Africa radio station, Radio Lesotho, and Catholic Radio".¹⁶³

¹⁶² HOLY SEE, "Instrumentum laboris" for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024), par. 75-76, retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html>.

¹⁶³ UN Human Rights Instruments, *Core document forming part of the reports of States parties: Lesotho* (13 January 2016), par. 166(c), retrieved at [HRI/CORE/LSO/2015](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/lesotho).

- » The Government of Lesotho noted, "A 2013 USAID survey report titled National Response Efforts to Address Sexual Violence and Exploitation Against Children in Lesotho revealed that almost 6% of all households had at least one child who had been subjected to violence in the previous twelve months. Around 1% had suffered sexual violence. One out of ten respondents noted that, in the year before the survey, they were personally aware of situations of sexual abuse in their immediate neighbourhoods; with this response being higher in urban areas".¹⁶⁴
- » The Government of Lesotho reported, "Statistical evidence regarding sexual abuse of children is inadequate. In 2005, of 668 cases reported to the CGPU, 51% were sexual offences; 166 of them involved the under 18s. Between January and June 2006, 789 sexual offence cases were reported; 179 involved children. Data covering the period April to December 2009 indicated 57 cases of neglect and 23 of assault against children. These cases also included common assault, abduction, and sexual assault. It is believed that these figures do not represent the magnitude of the problem fully".¹⁶⁵
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern about the "lack of comprehensive data on children suffering from ill-treatment, abuse and neglect, domestic violence and sexual abuse".¹⁶⁶
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern "at the reportedly increasing sexual abuse of school girls and girls engaged in domestic work. It is also concerned at the risk of physical and sexual violence that children, and girls in particular, are exposed to when collecting water, bathing or using toilets at night".¹⁶⁷



CATHOLIC BISHOP'S CONFERENCE OF NAMIBIA

Profile

Namibia is a nation with two dioceses and one apostolic vicariate. It relies on the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Namibia as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 5 November 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The bishops expressed the Conference's strong commitment to safeguarding during their *ad limina* visit. Notably, the bishops framed safeguarding as something rooted in the gospel. This

¹⁶⁴ CRC, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention: Second periodic reports of States parties due in 1999: Lesotho* (5 July 2017), par. 435, retrieved at [CRC/C/LSO/2](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/lesotho).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., par. 444.

¹⁶⁶ CRC, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Lesotho* (25 June 2018), par. 28(e), retrieved at [CRC/C/LSO/CO/2](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/lesotho).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., par. 30.

understanding and framing of safeguarding through gospel teachings is deeply consistent with Conversional Justice.

- » The most recent safeguarding guidelines for the Conference, in the Commission's archives, were published in 2017: "Protocol for Church personnel in regard to sexual abuse of minors". However, the bishops also mention a protocol that was reportedly signed and promulgated on 19 August 2019.
- » The Conference's 2017 guidelines are procedural in nature, outlining the operational steps and stages for conducting preliminary investigations that the ordinary must initiate under Canon 1717, whenever he receives a *notitia criminis*. The Conference's guideline document stipulates that victims/survivors should always be informed of their right to file a complaint with civil authorities. This is a good practice. Moreover, the Conference's guideline document provides basic provisions for the protection of the victim/survivor and their family, as well as for the accused's reputation. Finally, the Conference's guideline document allows access to the reporting system through any parish priest or clergy member.
- » The Conference reports to have adopted a dedicated Policy for the Protection of Minors and the Vulnerable in the school environment. This is a good practice.
- » The bishops report that safeguarding formation courses for Catholic schoolteachers were also attended by secular/public schoolteachers. This is an encouraging paradigm and highlights the potential of the local Church's leadership role in safeguarding throughout the broader society.
- » The Catholic Church stands as the second-largest public health service provider in Namibia. Catholic Health Services (CHS) reportedly operate within well-established CHS Policies and Programmes. The bishops report to be in the process of implementing revised Policies in the CHS facilities.
- » The bishops report that the dioceses and all religious congregations, working within the local Church, have committed themselves to following and adhering to the processes and procedures outlined in the guidelines documents. This is consistent with a One Church approach.
- » The Archdiocese of Windhoek has a "Street Children Ministry" that focuses on caring for children, keeping them off the street, and getting them back to school — especially to protect them from child abuse and human trafficking.
- » Namibia had one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, although the rate has been declining. There are programmes specifically designed to support orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS.
- » The Conference's Department of Justice and Peace hosts "Healing of Memories" workshops. These workshops focus on reconciliation, healing, and restoration of dignity for those who have suffered trauma and injustice. The workshops offer opportunities to explore and acknowledge the emotional wounds people carry at the individual and collective levels.

- » The Conference's Department of Justice and Peace has a team that is part of the discussion on the reparation process between the German government and the Herero/Nama communities. A representative of the German Bishops' Conference attended one of the workshops in Namibia that took place in the Erongo region. This practice is consistent with the reparations pillar of Conversional Justice.
- » The bishops cite a 24/7 WhatsApp hotline for people to report any case of abuse.
- » A "Promoting Safeguarding in the Church" workshop was held from 26 February to 1 March 2024.
- » One of the permanent deacons is in charge of an awareness programme about the safeguarding guidelines in different groups, especially among priests and religious.
- » In accordance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, a National Committee has been established in the Conference with qualified people from all relevant areas.
- » The Conference reports to be engaging in matters of child protection through pastoral letters and through the activities of the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office (CPLO), which is very active in Namibia.

• Challenges

- » The bishops have observed resistance from some of the clergy regarding the reporting of cases.
- » The Commission notes confusion around the publication date of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines document.
- » The bishops expressed concern about a lack of feedback from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the safeguarding guidelines that they reportedly submitted in March 2021.
- » The bishops report that they have not received the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
- » The bishops report that their biggest challenge is in bringing the safeguarding guidelines to life rather than just having them remain dormant on paper.
- » The Conference's 2017 guideline document does not include any preventive strategies, nor does it address the themes of formation or vocational discernment. The Commission also notes that this document does not develop the aspect of victim/survivor support through spiritual, medical, or financial assistance.
- » The local Church reports financial limitations that prevent a robust safeguarding regime.
- » Child abuse is increasingly involving sexual, physical, and emotional dimensions. There is particular concern about the resources needed in the diocesan hostels to deal with these forms of child abuse cases.
- » Some dioceses do not have diocesan tribunals in place.
- » The bishops report that safeguarding is not a structured part of seminary formation.
- » The Commission notes the lack of an external audit mechanism as part of the safeguarding apparatus in the local Church.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Namibia. The Memorare Initiative might particularly address resistance from some clergy through sensitisation, education, and formation around safeguarding. It could accompany the implementation of the safeguarding guidelines. It might also provide additional financial and human resources for the promotion of a culture of safeguarding, as well as allowing the pooling of resources to ensure adequate canonical responses to allegations — especially in dioceses without their own robust juridical infrastructure.
2. The Commission recommends the publication of the national safeguarding guidelines on the Conference's webpage.
3. The Commission requests the most up-to-date version of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines.
4. The Commission recommends a comprehensive review of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines. The Regional Group Africa stands ready to accompany this process.
5. The Commission invites the Conference to review the provisory text of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*. The Commission then recommends that the Conference establish contact with the Commission's Regional Group Africa to discuss this document's application to the local Church in Namibia.
6. The Commission requests a copy of the revised Catholic Health Services Policies and Procedures.
7. The Commission notes that the "Healing of Memories" workshops is a powerful display of Conversional Justice practices. The local Church in Namibia clearly has experience with Conversional Justice processes and could contribute to the Universal Church's understanding of how to implement these processes in the context of the sexual abuse crisis. The Commission requests more information from the local Church on its experience with the "Healing of Memories" workshops — especially regarding the concept of reparations, as part of the Conversional Justice framework.
8. The Commission recommends that the Conference's reporting structures be staffed by non-clerical persons, to avoid any intimidation factors for victims/survivors wishing to report a case of clerical abuse.
9. The Commission notes that the process of revising the *Ratio nationalis* is under way. The Commission recommends that provisions for safeguarding formation be included in the revised *Ratio nationalis*.
10. Two of the previous Apostolic Nuncios publicly acknowledged St. Charles Lwanga Seminary as one of the highest-quality seminaries in the Southern African region. The Commission requests more information regarding the safeguarding formation offered at St. Charles Lwanga.
11. The Commission requests more information on the scope and composition of the National Committee, established in compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, and that this information also be published on the Conference's website.

12. The Commission notes that the Conference's Department of Youth is in the process of addressing challenges that the local Church faces, through consultations and leadership engagement with youth on various levels. This process includes a revision of the National Youth Policy. The Commission recommends that the Department of Youth's consultations include questions regarding the national safeguarding guidelines.
13. The Commission recommends that the Conference develop and implement an external audit mechanism as a permanent part of its safeguarding regime. The Commission's Regional Group Africa stands ready to accompany this initiative.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Namibia (last reviewed in 2018):

- » The Government of Namibia reported provisions for "mandatory reporting by all persons who have a 'reasonable belief' that a child 'may need protection'".¹⁶⁸
- » The Community Empowerment and Development Association (civil society organisation) reported, "In many instances, Indigenous children lack protection both from their parents and from dominant members of the communities. Rape cases often go unreported, as victims are intimidated by authorities or perpetrators who bribe their way out of accountability. Cultural norms of shyness among children further compound this issue, leading many to suffer in silence. In some cases, involving church leaders can provide guidance and counselling to these children. However, addressing such sensitive matters requires a wealth of wisdom and knowledge to encourage victims to come forward".¹⁶⁹
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted deep concern about "the prevalence of violence against children, including gender-based violence, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse"¹⁷⁰ and "the inadequate services and insufficient coordination among the relevant sectors for supporting victims".¹⁷¹
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted the need to "conduct awareness-raising programmes, with the participation of traditional and religious leaders, to address discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family".¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ CRC, *Combined fourth to sixth periodic reports submitted by Namibia under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2017* (20 June 2023), par. 202, retrieved at [CRC/C/NAM/4-6](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/crc-nam/4-6).

¹⁶⁹ CEDA, *Alternative Reporting to the Government of the Republic of Namibia combined 4th to the 6th periodic report* (15 April 2024), par. 27, retrieved at [CEDA-NGO-Namibia-Session](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/crc-nam/4-6).

¹⁷⁰ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Namibia* (26 June 2024), par. 23(a), retrieved at [CRC/C/NAM/CO/4-6](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/crc-nam/4-6).

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, par. 23(c).

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, par. 27(b).

Profile

North Africa is a region comprising various countries whose bishops have formed the Conférence Épiscopale Régionale du Nord de l'Afrique (CERNA) as their episcopal conference. The Conference is composed of the bishops from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Western Sahara. Algeria is a nation with four dioceses. Tunisia is a nation with one diocese. Libya is a nation with three apostolic vicariates and one apostolic prefecture. Morocco is a nation with two dioceses. Western Sahara is a nation with one apostolic prefecture. The Commission met with the Conference on 21 November 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara documents a collaboration with the Archdiocese of Rabat whereby the Cardinal Archbishop of Rabat extended his listening centre to victims/survivors in Western Sahara. The Apostolic Prefect of Western Sahara in turn offered a designated priest from the Apostolic Prefecture to contribute to the work and be fully integrated into the listening centre's apparatus.¹⁷³ The Commission recognises this collaboration as a good practice and welcomes this leadership from H.E. Cardinal Cristóbal López Romero, Archbishop of Rabat, and Father Mario León Dorado, O.M.I., Apostolic Prefect of Western Sahara.
- » The local Church in Algeria cites dedicated resources for those staffing the diocesan listening centres to receive training in Algiers on active listening.
- » Responses to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire were received from 10 out of 12 ecclesiastical circumscriptions in the Conference, representing a response rate of 83 per cent.
- » The Conference's safeguarding guidelines document was published in May 2022: "Directives sur la conduite à tenir en cas d'abus sexuel sur mineurs ou personnes vulnérables".
- » Safeguarding guidelines were published in Algeria on 11 July 2024 — seemingly different from CERNA's directives.
- » The website of the Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara has a dedicated page for child protection.¹⁷⁴ This is a good practice.
- » The local Church in Algeria has an organization chart of the safeguarding apparatus in place. The chart was published in March 2021. This is a good practice.
- » A code of conduct is in place in Tunisia, adopted in August 2022: "Ensemble pour la dignité humaine: directoire sur la conduite à tenir en cas d'abus sur mineurs".
- » There is explicit mention of *Vos estis lux mundi* in the episcopal letter establishing listening centres in Algeria. This is a good practice.
- » Five different reporting channels are cited in the Algerian local Church.

¹⁷³ Fr. Luis Ignacio Rois Alonso is the designated priest in the Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara. Fr. Rois Alonso has safeguarding experience and is tasked with welcoming victims/survivors, through the listening centre in the local Church.

¹⁷⁴ See <https://egliscatholiquesahara.org/protection-des-mineurs/>.

- » The Algerian local Church's safeguarding guideline document includes an appendix with definitions of relevant terms.
- » The Archdiocese of Tunis's safeguarding guideline document contains a relevant glossary.
- » An announcement was made in all parishes in Western Sahara, with contact information clearly stated for reporting any cases of abuse. This is a good practice, especially according to the accessibility criteria stipulated in *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2.
- » The Archdiocese of Tunis reports that Catholic school directors are trained in safeguarding by Caritas Middle East and North Africa. The Archdiocese of Tunis notes that one of the focuses of this training is how to properly listen to presumed victims/survivors.
- » The Archdiocese of Tunis reports 15 people designated in the diocese for child protection.
- » The Algerian local Church established listening centres on 26 April 2023. The Commission notes 16 people working in the listening centres across the dioceses in Algeria. These listening centres reportedly have a standby team in place for victim/survivor accompaniment. The centres also include a psychotherapist referral network, with experts especially trained in the Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) method.
- » A sensitisation campaign is being developed, using a train-the-trainers model, to disseminate information on the reporting structures in Algeria.
- » CERNA's safeguarding document has a provision for the compensation of victims/survivors. This is a good practice that is especially consistent with the reparations pillar of Conversional Justice.
- » Caritas Morocco is said to be developing further safeguarding guidelines.
- » Informational articles on safeguarding were disseminated in the Algerian local Church through diocesan bulletins and on the Church's website.
- » Meetings were held in each parish in the Diocese of Constantine, presenting the testimony of an abuse survivor, during the fall of 2022. The Commission welcomes this important act of solidarity with victims/survivors of abuse. It is deeply consistent with Conversional Justice.
- » The local Church in Algeria cites one collaboration on safeguarding between the bishops and Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique (White Fathers). This is a good practice that is consistent with a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » The Diocese of Constantine has a pastoral dossier on safeguarding dated June 2021.
- » The local Church in Algeria reports individual listening centres in the four dioceses, established in 2019. These centres have a dedicated email address and fliers (available in two languages) that advertise information on how to access them. The fliers have been disseminated in all the parishes in Algeria.
- » There is a dedicated email address in the Archdiocese of Rabat for reporting cases. This is a good practice.
- » The local Church in Algeria has provisions in place for the management of alleged perpetrators.

- » The Diocese of Laghouat reports that contact information for the diocesan safeguarding point person is published in all buildings of the diocese — in both Arabic and French. This contact information includes a telephone number and email address.
- » The Archdiocese of Tunis reports that all school directors have been designated as referents for hearing reports. This is a good practice.
- » The Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara cites safeguarding formation in 2023 and 2024 for all staff.
- » Caritas Middle East and North Africa is a strong supporter of safeguarding in the region and is partnering well with the local dioceses.
- » The local Church in Algeria notes 17 distinct training programmes and opportunities offered between 2021 and 2024. The Algerian bishops specifically cite the following formation opportunities: formation for the clergy in 2024, exploring 19 case studies of abuse; formation for the clergy in 2023, exploring the risks and dangers of spiritual accompaniment; a half-day of formation for the clergy in the Diocese of Constantine in 2022, sensitising the local clergy to CERNA's directives; training for student chaplains in 2022 regarding the prevention of abuse; and a Power-Point video to all parish priests in 2019, presenting information on the listening centres.
- » The Archdiocese of Rabat held a day of safeguarding formation for the archdiocesan clergy.
- » The Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara cites various officers of the Prefecture who signed an attestation that they were aware of the protection policy and committed to complying with it.
- » The Algerian bishops report that they are preparing an attestation for each priest arriving in Algeria for ministry, regarding clean background checks, targeted for implementation in January 2025.
- » The Diocese of Laghouat reports that missionary priests and religious must present background checks upon arrival to the diocese, under a signed agreement between the ordinary and the sending bishop/superior general.
- » The Apostolic Prefecture of Western Sahara reports plans to update the safeguarding policies and procedures in 2025.
- » The Algerian bishops report a first external evaluation conducted on the local Church's safeguarding regime. The bishops foresee another external evaluation in 2026.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes that no diocese explicitly reports a dedicated budget for safeguarding.
- » There is a lack of clarity in the titles and publication dates of the Conference's safeguarding guideline document(s). Some dioceses report the publication date of the CERNA's guidelines in September 2019, while others report the publication date in September 2021. The Commission's own archives note May 2022 as the publication date.
- » There is a lack of clarity around which safeguarding guidelines apply to which ecclesiastical circumscriptions. A range of safeguarding documents demonstrate a disaggregated and perhaps

overlapping approach to safeguarding provisions across the Conference. The Commission notes a challenge with implementing these safeguarding guidelines when there is possible confusion around the most relevant and applicable text.

- » CERNA's safeguarding guidelines have a definition of abuse that is not consistent with canon law.
- » A code of conduct was said to be published in September 2019 for the entire episcopal conference, but it is unclear if one is actually in place.
- » There is no evidence of any stable safeguarding reporting structures at the Conference level.
- » The bishops expressed challenges with navigating different safeguarding requirements imposed by various stakeholders.
- » The Commission notes its concern about an expressed lack of safeguarding volunteers in the Algerian local Church.
- » There are limited resources for victim/survivor accompaniment in some Algerian dioceses; they rely on other dioceses for support.
- » Geopolitical limitations prevent smooth travel between some of the countries within the Conference, which poses challenges for the bishops' cooperation in safeguarding across borders. Similarly, large geographical distances make it hard to reach out to victims/survivors and mobilize the human resources to do so.
- » The Commission notes no collaboration reported in the Algerian local Church between bishops and lay movements.
- » The Commission notes its concern that in the Tunisian and Moroccan local Churches, there is a lack of sensitisation to safeguarding among the religious and lay associations. The bishops' expressed concerns about how to synchronise religious orders' safeguarding standards with the diocesan standards. The Apostolic Nuncio in Morocco further highlights the importance of promoting collaboration around safeguarding among the bishops, the religious, and the lay associations.
- » The Archdiocese of Rabat acknowledged that lay pastoral agents still need to be trained in safeguarding, as they often minister to children in the dioceses.
- » The local Church in Algeria cites strong cultural taboos, large migrant populations, large geographic distances within the dioceses, and a lack of sensitisation on the phenomenon of abuse.
- » The local Church in Libya is working to develop a robust working relationship with the civil authorities in matters of safeguarding.
- » There is a lack of trust in digital reporting mechanisms, and a resulting preference for in-person reporting.
- » Because CERNA guidelines recommend listening centres in each diocese but do not require them, they are not fully consistent with the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » There are no documented reporting structures in the Libyan local Church.
- » Local Church authorities report limited human resources across the Conference who are trained in safeguarding and able to offer formation courses. This concern is shared by the Commission.

- » The bishops expressed concern about conflicting and overlapping formation requirements. The bishops request the Commission's help to streamline the safeguarding certification process.
- » The local Church in Libya expressed its hopes of collaborating with the Nuncio, as soon as he arrives — the Nunciature has reportedly remained closed until now, despite Pope Francis's appointment of a Nuncio in 2023.
- » The Archdiocese of Tunis reports no audit mechanism in place, although the archbishop is set to review and renew the mandate and composition of the diocesan child protection commission in 2025.
- » There are three distinct Papal Representatives across the various countries where the Conference's membership resides. The residence of CERN's President determines the specific Apostolic Nunciature that is tasked with direct and ongoing relations with the Conference. As a result, there are challenges with ensuring continuity and follow-up among CERN and the Papal Representatives during a change in presidency, if the Nunciature with jurisdiction also changes.

Recommendations

1. A dedicated safeguarding budget should be part of each diocese's annual budget.
2. The two dioceses that have not yet completed the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire should do so as soon as possible.
3. The Commission requests clarification on the title and publication date of the national safeguarding guidelines.
4. The Commission recommends a comprehensive review of CERN's safeguarding guidelines by the Regional Group Africa, to ensure consistency and common standards across the Conference while still respecting differences across national boundaries. This review should especially address the issue of a definition of abuse that is consistent with canon law.
5. The Commission requests to see the organization chart of the safeguarding structure in Algeria, and recommends its publication and widespread dissemination across the local Church.
6. The Commission requests clarification on the presence and/or status of code(s) of conduct across the Conference, and specifically requests to see the existing code of conduct in Tunisia.
7. In light of the bishops' request for a contact person at the Commission, the Commission recommends establishing direct contact with the Regional Group Africa.
8. The Commission, the Conference, and Caritas Internationalis should have a three-way dialogue in order to synchronise the safeguarding standards promoted in the local Church.
9. When the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on Vulnerability, the Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the concept of vulnerability, especially in their outreach to disabled children — and welcomes the opportunity to arrange meetings between the Conference and the Commission's specialized personnel.

10. Adoption of the Memorare Initiative in the various countries within the Conference could help ensure the pooling of limited resources, as has already been demonstrated in the Diocese of Laghouat with its reliance on other dioceses for victim/survivor accompaniment services. The Memorare Initiative would also work toward 1) the facilitation of a One Church approach, in order to address some of the concerns expressed by the local Church regarding insufficient collaboration among the bishops, religious, and lay associations; 2) ensuring full compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*, especially in view of the local cultural preference for in-person reporting; 3) promoting robust safeguarding formation across the Conference; and 4) centralising a safeguarding certification process for the local Church in response to the complicated and reportedly overlapping certification requirements that are currently being navigated. To address geopolitical concerns, the Commission welcomes the exploration of a series of national Memorare Initiatives in each of the countries within the Conference, rather than one centralized Memorare Initiative.
11. The Commission requests more information on the Conference's experiences with compensating victims, or any other practices of reparations that have been enacted in the local Church, consistent with CERN guidelines for compensation of victims.
12. The Commission recommends the Moroccan bishops' full support of Caritas Morocco's swift development and publication of safeguarding guidelines, consistent with the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
13. The Commission requests to see a copy of the pastoral dossier on safeguarding from the Diocese of Constantine, to further explore it as a good practice.
14. The Commission requests to see a copy of the provisions in place for the management of alleged perpetrators in the Algerian local Church.
15. The local Church in Libya should immediately document its reporting structure to ensure compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
16. The Commission requests to see the results of the external evaluation conducted in the Algerian local Church.
17. The Conference's safeguarding structure should include a systematic external audit. The Commission is available to accompany this initiative.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Algeria (last reviewed in 2012):

¹⁷⁵ CRC, *Replies to the list of issues in relation to the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Algeria* (19 April 2012), par. 118, retrieved at [CRC/C/DZA/Q/3-4/ADD.1](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/C/DZA/Q/3-4/ADD.1).

- » The Government of Algeria reported 1,555 cases of sexual abuse against minors in 2010; 1,634 cases in 2009; and 1,616 cases in 2008.¹⁷⁵
- » The Algerian Network for the Defense of Children (civil society organisation) highlighted that “...all persons in charge of children should be trained on issues of sexual abuse: parents, teachers, doctors (particularly academic physicians), educators, etc.”¹⁷⁶
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed “...deep concern that sexual abuse against children in school, including religious schools, incest, and pedophilia are on the rise in the State party...The Committee is also concerned about...child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse being discouraged or afraid of reporting rape...”¹⁷⁷

The Commission notes the following relevant finding from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Tunisia (last reviewed in 2021):

- » The Association ADO+ (civil society organisation) noted that “many development indicators are still lacking, particularly in the areas of protecting children against all forms of violence, sexual abuse and the rights of disabled children”.¹⁷⁸

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Morocco, including Western Sahara (last reviewed in 2014):

- » The Government of Morocco reported 2,248 cases of abuse and exploitation of minors over the three-year period prior to 2014.¹⁷⁹
- » A series of civil society organisations noted concerns about underreporting of sexual abuse cases due to intimidating legislation surrounding sexual acts outside of marriage.¹⁸⁰
- » The Consortium for Street Children (civil society organisation) reported that “...on the street, children are persistently exposed to physical, sexual, and psychological violence, from members of the public, gangs, people in positions of authority, and other street children”.¹⁸¹
- » The *Associations Marocaines de Protection de l'Enfance* (civil society organisation) noted the need to “strengthen the capacities of the various actors involved in identifying and reporting sexual violence, by establishing a culture of denunciation and making it a compulsory civic act”; it also noted the need for “a general database on child protection, including a section on sexual violence against children, disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence, place where the violence was committed, perpetrators, complaints lodged, time between the commission of the violence and the complaint, and the response given to the complaint”.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ The Algerian Network for the Defense of Children, *The Algerian Alternative Report on Children's Rights* (2011), p. 21, retrieved at [The Algerian Network for the Defense of Children](#).

¹⁷⁷ CRC, *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention: Concluding observations on Algeria* (18 July 2012), par. 75, retrieved at [CRC/C/DZA/CO/3-4](#).

¹⁷⁸ ASSOCIATION ADO+, *Alternative report in relation to the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports for Tunisia* (September 2019), par. 23, retrieved at [ADO_NGO_Tunisia_PSWG](#).

¹⁷⁹ CRC, *Replies to the list of issues in relation to the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Morocco* (17 July 2014), par. 172, retrieved at [CRC/C/MAR/Q/3-4/Add.1](#).

¹⁸⁰ The Advocates for Human Rights & MRA Mobilising for Rights Associates, *Morocco's Compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (February 2014), par. 5, retrieved at [Morocco_Advocates for Human Rights-MRA_CRC Report_EN](#).

¹⁸¹ Consortium for Street Children, *NGO Shadow Report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 67th Session: Street Children in Morocco* (October 2013), p. 3, retrieved at [Morocco_Consortium for Street Children_CRC Report](#).

¹⁸² Associations Marocaines de Protection de l'Enfance, *Alternative report based on the points raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Moroccan government* (July 2014), p. 3, retrieved at [Morocco_National coalition_Comments on LOIs and WRs_Annex_FR](#).

- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted concern that “the criminalisation of sexual relations outside of marriage leads girl victims of sexual abuse to be considered as offenders and dissuades them from lodging a complaint against their abusers”.¹⁸³
- » The Commission notes no relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Libya (last reviewed in 2003).



CONFÉRENCE ÉPISCOPALE DU MALI

Profile

Mali is a nation with six dioceses. It relies on the Conférence Épiscopale du Mali as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 11 November 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The bishops expressed the local Church's strong commitment to and active role in child protection through pastoral and social action.
- » The most recent comprehensive safeguarding guideline document was published in 2015: “Directives pour le traitement des cas d'abus sexuel commis par des clercs à l'égard de mineurs”.
- » An additional safeguarding document dedicated to Catholic education, “Lignes directrices pour la protection des mineurs et des personnes vulnérables dans les écoles et universités catholiques au Mali”, is structured as a code of conduct and includes preventive and disciplinary measures. It also includes an introductory section that references relevant biblical and canonical sources on safeguarding. This is a good practice to help develop a theological basis for the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
- » The local Church runs orphanages and programmes to support children without family care.
- » The Diocese of Mopti reports a good relationship with the local authorities, especially in security, education, development, and religion. Church leaders are reportedly regularly invited to participate in meetings with the local authorities.
- » The bishops report that there have been sensitisation campaigns against child marriages, jointly promoted by the civil authorities and the Church.
- » The Conference requested and is open to accompaniment from the Roman Curia in further developing the clergy's formation in the local Church. The Commission welcomes this openness and stands ready to accompany the local Church in this regard.

¹⁸³ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Morocco* (14 October 2014), par. 40(b), retrieved at [CRC/C/MAR/CO/3-4](#).

- » Many dioceses have physical formation centres as existing infrastructure that could be used for safeguarding courses.
- » The bishops report a safeguarding training session in 2023 for priests, who were reportedly open-minded to the formation.
- » The Diocese of Kayes reports a new generation of Christians that is reportedly demanding transparency and traceability from Church leaders (bishops, clergy, and pastors). The Commission notes the bishop's call for a pastoral conversion to respond to this demand from the young Christians. The Commission welcomes and applauds this leadership from the Diocese and notes its consistency with Conversional Justice and the Synod on Synodality's call for greater transparency and accountability in Church governance.¹⁸⁴
- » Despite arriving after the reporting period, the Commission welcomed the Conference's submission of a thorough and detailed response to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire. The Commission looks forward to reviewing the responses and discussing them with the Conference in the context of the dialogue planned after the publication of this Annual Report.

• Challenges

- » The Conference's website does not seem to be functioning and accessible.
- » The main safeguarding document dates to 2015, and therefore does not reflect recent changes in approach and shifts in perspective in managing abuse cases.
- » The safeguarding guideline document lacks clear provisions regarding the establishment of specific offices and services dedicated to the reception and support of victims/survivors.
- » Certain dioceses have youth formation programmes in place, although no training modules are currently devoted to safeguarding.
- » One bishop expressed the urgency of proactively sensitising the clergy on safeguarding, rather than waiting for a case to arise before implementing a robust safeguarding regime.
- » The Commission notes its concern about individualism and a negative solidarity among the clergy that could lead to the covering up of inconsistencies among the clergy.
- » The safeguarding document does not include provisions for preventive training and awareness.
- » Financial challenges in many of the dioceses, due to very limited resources, prevent robust outreach to victims/survivors and their communities.
- » The bishops expressed concern about the emerging challenges posed by social media, as well as the need to better use social-media communications to reach more people, especially young people.
- » There is a large diversity of language usage in the local Church.
- » The Commission notes reports of criminality, child marriage, child soldiers, child labor, and terrorism affecting minors.
- » One bishop insisted on the need to have better organisation of and care for the local Church's archives and the need to collect better statistics in the local Church.

- » There are reports of a lack of financial transparency.
- » The Commission notes reports of diocesan entities that are undeveloped or inoperative in practice.
- » There are reports of members of the clergy who struggle to unify around the pastoral priorities in the dioceses, including the safeguarding ministry of the local Church.
- » There is no audit mechanism built into the safeguarding guidelines of the local Church.

Recommendations

1. The safeguarding guideline document should be widely disseminated to the People of God in Mali, and the document regarding safeguarding in Catholic schools and universities should be posted in all institutions where they are in force.
2. A comprehensive review and updating of the Conference's safeguarding guidelines document should be undertaken, to ensure that the document reflects recent changes to Universal Law, including updates to Book VI of the Code of Canon Law and the revised version of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
3. Diocesan youth formation programmes should include a module on safeguarding, to empower children and young people.
4. The Diocese of Mopti's proposed pastoral strategic plan should place priority on the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
5. A robust safeguarding formation and sensitisation campaign should be designed and implemented, especially targeting the clergy in the local Church, with emphasis on the mandatory reporting requirements delineated in *Vos estis lux mundi*.
6. Adopting the Memorare Initiative in Mali would help build capacity around the local Church's safeguarding ministry. The Commission's Memorare Fund could provide financial resources to support the bishops' outreach ministry to victims/survivors. The Memorare Initiative would also work toward reporting structures that are fully compliant with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
7. Safeguarding policies and procedures should be in place in Church-run orphanages to ensure the safety of the children in the local Church's custody.
8. The Diocese of Kayes hosts diocesan pastoral days every year for all priests, nuns, catechists, and lay people with responsibilities in the diocese. The Commission recommends that these pastoral days include a discussion of safeguarding, as a component of the local Church's commitment to ongoing formation.
9. The bishops report an inter-institutional collaboration among the bishops' conference, religious, the state, and international associations. The Commission recommends leveraging this collaboration to further advance the local Church's safeguarding ministry, consistent with a One Church approach.

10. The Commission recommends a direct dialogue between the Conference and the Commission's specialised personnel, after the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on On-line Abuse. The Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the risks and possibilities of the digital world.
11. Safeguarding material should be translated into the various local languages in the dioceses, to make this information more accessible to the People of God in Mali.
12. The Conference provides three years of formation for catechists at the Centre for Catechetical Formation in Ntoniba, within the Archdiocese of Bamako. This centre is the property of the Conference. The Commission requests information regarding the curriculum taught during these three years of formation and recommends dedicated modules on safeguarding.
13. The Commission requests the Conference's perspective on how the Commission might help in the local Church's data collection efforts and capacity.
14. The Conference should develop and approve a routine external audit provision as part of the national safeguarding guidelines.
15. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with the concept of reparations. Importantly, as covered in the Conversional Justice Introduction to this Annual Report, the Commission emphasises the broad range of practices that are included in the concept of reparations, and is not limited to the provision of financial damages. Therefore, the Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church. Such a contribution will contribute to the Commission's ongoing study, across the Universal Church.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant finding from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Mali (last reviewed in 2024):

- » The Government of Mali reported 94 cases of sexual exploitation of children between the ages of 11 and 18 years old in 2021; 97 cases of sexual exploitation of children between the ages of 3 and 18 years old in 2022; and 133 cases of sexual exploitation of children between the ages of 1 month and 18 years old in 2023.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ HOLY SEE, "Instrumentum laboris" (October 2024), par. 75–76, retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html>.

¹⁸⁵ CRC, *Replies of Mali to the list of issues in relation to the combined third to fifth periodic reports* (12 March 2024), par. 97, retrieved at [CRC/C/MLI/RQ/3-5](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/crc/mlr/rq/3-5).



KENYA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Profile

Kenya is a nation with 26 dioceses and 1 military Ordinate. It relies on the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 28 August 2024.

Safeguarding overview

- » The document "Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, policy and procedures" is the Conference's main national safeguarding guidelines document. It was under review for two years and approved in the bishops' April 2024 Plenary Assembly. It is in the process of being published.
- » A Child Protection Desk domiciled in the Canon Law National Office serves as the national safeguarding office, led by the Coordinator of the Child Protection Desk. It is assisted by a safeguarding committee with six members selected from the staff working at the KCCB.
- » The bishops attest to a reporting desk in every diocese alongside the national reporting structure housed within the Child Protection Desk. Reports can be made via a complaints form by email or mail. These reporting methods allow for anonymity. In some cases, a safeguarding contact person is reported to be present even at the parish level. This robust reporting apparatus is a good practice.
- » A reported 696 people across the Conference are dedicated to prevention and an estimated 139 people across the Conference are dedicated to case management.
- » The bishops specifically mentioned safeguarding as a pastoral ministry of the Church. This acknowledgement is deeply consistent with Conversional Justice, which promotes safeguarding as profoundly rooted in the gospel and a central part of the Church's ministry.
- » The Diocese of Kitui reports dedicating 2,000,000 Ksh (approximately €13,300) for prevention measures and 500,000 Ksh (approximately €3,000) for case management. This dedicated budget is a good practice.
- » The Commission welcomes the openness expressed by H.E. Archbishop Maurice Muhatia Makumba, Chairman of the KCCB, to further collaborate with the Commission.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma has a zero-tolerance policy in place and commits to proactive reporting to the police.
- » The bishops shared that they were particularly grateful for the closeness of the Commission's Regional Expert and Regional Advisor.
- » A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in the Ecclesiastical Province of Mombasa for the Memorare Initiative; the Commission acknowledges H.E. Archbishop Martin Musonde Kivuva for his leadership in negotiating the Memorare Initiative in his Metropolitan See.
- » The Diocese of Lodwar demonstrated a particularly comprehensive set of guideline documents and structures.

- » Some of the resources for promoting safe environments include the following documents: Raising Voices teachers guide (2019); Raising Voices learners book (2019); Raising Voices trainers' manual (2019); and Raising Voices parents and community guidebook (2019).
- » The Diocese of Eldoret has adopted the KCCB safeguarding policy document, which reportedly applies to everyone working in the diocese.
- » The Diocese of Kericho has adopted the "Making Life Responsible Choices Programme", which includes safeguarding provisions to educate children on their rights.
- » The Archdiocese of Nairobi and the Diocese of Bungoma have a Parental Consent Form for Children, sensitising parents on the diocesan safeguarding policies before their children participate in diocesan activities. This is a good practice.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma reports that a proactive risk management approach is used for all activities in the Diocese that involve children. Moreover, all new staff and volunteers are required to sign the diocesan code of conduct. These are both good practices.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma reports that all minors of appropriate age are offered safeguarding education on issues of crime and victimisation, including a discussion of online abuse. The emphasis placed on the risks associated with online abuse is a particularly good practice.
- » Rescue centres are reportedly available for the safety of victims/survivors, along with spiritual accompaniment and counselling.
- » The Diocese of Ngong reports to have circulated a questionnaire to help in its formulation of a diocesan case management policy. This is a good practice that works toward the promotion of a culture of safeguarding among the broader ecclesial community. It also allows the policy to be culturally responsive and gain buy-in from the People of God in the diocese, through its synodal approach.
- » The Diocese of Eldoret has a counselling centre available for victims/survivors.
- » The Archdiocese of Kisumu reports that staff are trained on trauma-informed communication. This is a good practice.
- » In the bishops' April 2024 Plenary Assembly, a decision was made to establish a joint committee with members from the KCCB Secretariat, the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK), and the Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya (RSCK) with the objective of promoting greater collaboration in safeguarding between the bishops and the religious.
- » The Diocese of Ngong requires that new members to religious life undergo an induction course on diocesan safeguarding policies.
- » Over 50 schools across the Conference have reportedly been targeted with radio programming regarding safeguarding.
- » The Conference's Commission for Education and Religious Education offers safeguarding training to all those interacting with minors at the community level. Porticus (philanthropic organization) supported this training initiative with approximately 60 million Ksh (€400,000) between 2021 and 2024.

- » The Archdiocese of Kisumu reports that agreements exist between the local Church and the civil authorities.
- » The Diocese of Lodwar reports its close participation in Turkana County civil networks, councils, and committees. This represents a good collaboration with the civil authorities and wider community, especially in a part of the country that experiences significant instability.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma reports to have included lay associations in its safeguarding sensitisation campaigns. This is a particularly important and good practice, considering the large presence of lay associations in the local Church.
- » The bishops report growing interest among their faithful for safeguarding training.
- » The bishops specifically mentioned the Government of Kenya's Child Helpline Number,¹⁸⁶ which can be used to report a case to the civil authorities.
- » The bishops report a good working relationship, including on safeguarding issues, with the Government's Directorate of Children Services and National Council for Children's Services, indicating a strong commitment at the Conference level to working with civil authorities.
- » The Archdiocese of Kisumu conducts risk assessments when a report is received to evaluate the likelihood of a perpetrator re-offending. This is a good practice.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma cites four designated reporting persons in the diocese, one of which is a psycho-social counsellor.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma explains that transfers are not allowed for an alleged perpetrator, and the accused perpetrator is suspended during investigations. This is a good practice that is consistent with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's guidance.
- » The Institute of Youth Ministry at Tangaza University offers safeguarding training to clergy, religious, and laity. This course is primarily taught by a religious sister.
- » A course on safeguarding is reportedly offered at all seminaries.
- » The Diocese of Bungoma reports workshops on child protection for clergy at the deanery level on an ongoing basis. Seminars on the child protection policy are conducted quarterly at the diocesan and deanery levels for all those interacting with children.
- » Background checks are reportedly conducted for candidates to Holy Orders, after which announcements of a bishop's intention to ordain a deacon or priest are made to the People of God on three consecutive Sundays. The People of God are invited to submit their opinions on the viability of that person for ordination. This is a creative and good practice that empowers the People of God and follows a synodal logic.
- » The Conference's safeguarding guidelines require that adequate background information be exchanged between sending and receiving bishops when *fidei donum* priests are sent and received.
- » The Diocese of Lodwar has provisions for sanctioning perpetrators in its code of conduct, in order to promote transparency in their handling of offenders. This is a good practice.

¹⁸⁶ See [Services-116](#) | [Social Protection](#).

- » In 2023, Catholic Relief Services conducted an audit of the KCCB safeguarding policies.
- » The Archdiocese of Kisumu and the Diocese of Lodwar report plans for an audit through Catholic Relief Services' Holistic Organisational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI).¹⁸⁷
- » The Diocese of Kitui reports to periodically host focus group listening sessions to audit its safeguarding structures. This is a good practice that should be replicated across the Conference.

• Challenges

- » Only 10 dioceses replied to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire, out of 26 dioceses (and one military Ordinate), representing a 37 percent response rate. The KCCB supplemented these responses with a unified response to the questionnaire on behalf of the whole Conference.
- » The Child Protection Desk does not have a permanently allocated budget, relying instead on the Canon Law National Office's budget.
- » The Child Protection Desk is under-resourced. The KCCB believes that it needs at least four people at the national level, fully dedicated to safeguarding.
- » Only one diocese (Kitui) has a dedicated budget for safeguarding.
- » The bishops expressed some hesitancy about adopting the Memorare Initiative at the national level following a November 2022 Commission delegation visit to Kenya, when the Memorare Initiative was first presented to the Conference.
- » The bishops expressed concern that many dioceses do not have enough resources (financial or human) for a robust safeguarding apparatus. They specifically mentioned the lack of resources for disclosure and barring services (vetting procedures) or training for volunteers. One bishop further expressed concern about the lack of safe homes for minors during case proceedings, a limited capacity in processing cases, and a limited ability to provide enhanced training for those accompanying victims/survivors.
- » The Conference's code of conduct is still under development.
- » Most dioceses have their own safeguarding guidelines document, separate from the KCCB document. This disaggregated approach might lead to redundant efforts and cause confusion regarding which safeguarding guidelines to follow.
- » The bishops expressed concern that the definition of vulnerable adult remains very nebulous. The Commission notes the bishops' request for information and guidance on this concept.
- » Human resources available for child protection at the diocesan level are reportedly limited with respect to the demand for accompaniment services.
- » The bishops expressed concern that the provision of psychological services is expensive and that very few professionals trained in this field have been identified in the local Church.

- » One bishop expresses a need for the establishment of a referral network for victim/survivor accompaniment services.
- » Not all dioceses report collaborating with lay associations on safeguarding concerns.
- » Many cultural and societal ills are reported by the bishops, necessitating a holistic approach to safeguarding.
- » One bishop expressed concern about an overreliance on interpersonal trust and informality. A cultural shift toward adherence to formal policies and procedures could address this concern.
- » There is a need to translate information on the local Church's reporting structures into common languages for greater accessibility.
- » The bishops report that cultural taboos make reporting very difficult for victims/survivors.
- » There are few facilities in the country to deal with perpetrators.
- » One diocese requires religious orders to assume full responsibility for a case of abuse committed by any of their members ministering in the diocese. This approach is inconsistent with the ordinary's ultimate canonical responsibility for any case of abuse that occurs within his diocese.
- » In one diocese, the procedures for handling a complaint seem to be inconsistent with *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, whereby the Diocesan Review Board makes a recommendation to the Child Protection Coordinator on how to proceed, rather than the case being immediately forwarded to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith for further instruction.
- » The Commission notes its concern regarding a lack of assurance that perpetrators are fully prohibited from interacting with minors or vulnerable adults when they are receiving treatment in dedicated facilities.
- » The bishops acknowledge that greater training would help safeguarding professionals work more efficiently, and that more pastoral agents need to be professionally trained in counselling.
- » One bishop expressed concern that scheduling and effectively communicating training opportunities for volunteers can be challenging.
- » The Commission notes that cases involving vulnerable adults are said to be dealt with by the local ordinary from start to finish. It is unclear if this sweeping approach is consistent with the current Universal Law in force, especially as stipulated in *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » The bishops acknowledge the persistent need to better include victims'/survivors' voices in the improvement of safeguarding policies.

Recommendations

1. Any dioceses that have not yet responded to the safeguarding-specific quinquennial questionnaire should do so as soon as possible.
2. The Conference should publish its national safeguarding guidelines on the KCCB website.

¹⁸⁷ CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES, *Holistic Organizational Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI)*, retrieved at [Institute for Capacity Strengthening](#).

3. The Conference and the dioceses should publish information regarding their reporting structures on their respective websites, perhaps following the example set by their brother bishops in Slovakia, with reporting structures organised by diocese/eparchy on a dedicated webpage.¹⁸⁸
4. The Commission requests more information on the scope and nature of the local Church's collaboration with the 696 people dedicated to prevention and the 139 people dedicated to case management.
5. The Commission recommends the KCCB's adoption of the Memorare Initiative for the whole Conference, which would support the Conference's stated need of approximately four professional resource people at the national level who are fully dedicated to safeguarding. The Memorare Initiative would also supplement the Conference's outreach and accompaniment to victims/survivors, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*.
6. Each diocese should dedicate funds for safeguarding in their annual budgets.
7. The Commission requests that the Conference send its updated safeguarding guidelines, as approved in April 2024, and engage with the Commission in a comprehensive review of these guidelines. The Commission also recommends a robust dissemination and implementation strategy for the updated safeguarding guidelines following the review. The Commission's Regional Group Africa remains available to accompany these next steps.
8. The Conference should publish on its website the names and contact information of the KCCB's Coordinator of the Child Protection Desk and safeguarding committee members.
9. The Commission recommends the Conference's swift completion of its code of conduct, with an expected completion date made public. The Regional Group Africa remains available to accompany the development and publication of this code of conduct.
10. The Commission recommends a study at the Conference level, conducted by the Child Protection Desk, into the extent to which individual and disaggregated diocesan safeguarding guidelines represent a challenge to the effective and efficient promotion of a culture of safeguarding.
11. The Commission recommends a direct dialogue between the Conference and the Commission's specialised personnel after the Commission publishes its findings from the Study Group on Vulnerability. The Commission hopes that these findings might accompany the bishops in their understanding of the concept of vulnerability.
12. The Commission recommends specific collaboration with the local civil authorities on issues of safeguarding, including the further dissemination and promotion of the Government of Kenya's Child Helpline Number.
13. The Commission recommends the translation of information regarding the local Church's reporting structures in order to increase the accessibility of these services, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*.

¹⁸⁸ See Úvod - Nahlásenie sexuálneho zneužívania maloletých v Katolíckej Cirkvi na Slovensku.

14. The Commission recommends unity among the bishops in the promotion of a cultural shift away from an overreliance on interpersonal trust and informality and toward adherence to formal policies and procedures.
15. The Commission recommends the development of a protocol to deal with perpetrators receiving treatment in dedicated facilities that specifically prohibits and prevents their interaction with minors and vulnerable adults.
16. The Commission recommends a dialogue among the Regional Group Africa, the Conference, and the leadership of Tangaza University to see how the Commission might support the expansion of Tangaza University's safeguarding formation opportunities to other countries in the region, consistent with the need expressed in the Commission's pilot Annual Report (for reporting period 2023) for a regional academic programme.
17. The Commission requests that the Conference share the results of the safeguarding audit conducted by Catholic Relief Services, for the Commission's review and analysis. The bishops should consider publication of the results from that safeguarding audit as a commitment to transparency and accountability in their synodal relationship with the People of God in Kenya.
18. The Commission recommends the bishops' support and establishment of a victim/survivor advocacy group, to help inform policy development.
19. The Conference should develop and approve a routine external audit provision, as part of the national safeguarding guidelines.
20. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Conference on the local Church's experiences with the concept of reparations. Importantly, as covered in the Conversional Justice Introduction to this Annual Report, the Commission emphasises the broad range of practices that are included in the concept of reparations, and is not limited to the provision of financial damages. Therefore, the Commission welcomes the Conference's wisdom on how the local Church can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church. Such a contribution will contribute to the Commission's ongoing study, across the Universal Church.

• Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Kenya (last reviewed in 2016):

- The Government of Kenya noted, "According to the Violence Against Children Report completed in 2012 (GOK and UNICEF), violence against children is a serious problem in Kenya with lifetime consequences for victims...Violence against children is mostly committed by person closest to them, including parents, relatives, and figures of authority such as teachers and religious leaders".¹⁸⁹

- » Edmund Rice International (civil society organisation) reported, “According to a national survey conducted in 2010 on violence against children in Kenya, three out of every ten females and nearly two out of every ten males aged 18 to 24 reported at least one experience of sexual violence prior to age 18...”¹⁹⁰
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child welcomed “recognition in the Constitution of the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration. However, the Committee is concerned that this right is often not respected in informal justice systems or in dispute resolution outside of courts of justice, in particular with regard to cases of sexual offences”.¹⁹¹
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child shared concern about the “lack of access to justice for child victims of violence, particularly in cases of sexual violence and harmful practices, due to social stigma, pressure from family members, low rates of investigation and prosecution, frequent delays in court proceedings, lenient sanctions imposed, the risk of revictimisation in the justice system and the lack of legal aid and other supports”.¹⁹²



EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GREECE

Profile

Greece is a nation with eight dioceses, one ordinariate, one apostolic exarchate, and one apostolic vicariate. It relies on the Episcopal Conference of Greece as its episcopal conference. The Commission met with the Conference on 28 November 2024.

• Safeguarding overview

- » A document that serves as the Conference’s national safeguarding guidelines, “Linee guida per la tutela dei minori e delle persone vulnerabili”, was issued in December 2021 (not available online); this document represents a solid basis for the Conference’s safeguarding efforts.
- » The Conference expressed its openness and availability regarding the Commission’s review of the national safeguarding guidelines and recommendations on their effective implementation.
- » The Conference proactively requested the Commission’s accompaniment in the realisation of a more robust safeguarding apparatus, especially with regard to formation opportunities.

¹⁸⁹ CRC, *Annexes to the combined third to fifth periodic report submitted under article 44 of the Convention* (2015), Part III.2.c, retrieved at [Kenya_Annexes_3-5 CRC Report](#).

¹⁹⁰ EDMUND RICE INTERNATIONAL, *Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Child Rights in Kenya* (July 2015), par. 30, retrieved at [Kenya_Edmond Rice_Session_CRC](#).

¹⁹¹ CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Kenya* (21 March 2016), par. 23, retrieved at [CRC/C/KEN/CO/3-5](#).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, par. 33(d).

- » The Conference expressed its commitment to safeguarding.
- » The Conference has an ongoing dialogue with the Commission, in follow-up to the *ad limina* visit.
- » The perception among the bishops is that there is a growing awareness around safeguarding issues in Greek society.
- » There are two ecclesiastical courts in the local Church, one of first instance as well as an appellate court.
- » The Archdiocese of Athens schools are members of a European safeguarding network and have hosted several safeguarding events in the archdiocese.
- » The Archdiocese of Athens has a professional psychologist in the local Church, who was trained in safeguarding at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The bishops note that this person serves as the Conference’s point person for any case of abuse within the local Church.

• Challenges

- » The national safeguarding guidelines do not account for recent updates to Church law relevant to safeguarding, specifically the updated version of *Vos estis lux mundi* and the recent revisions of Book VI of Canon Law.
- » The national safeguarding guidelines lack adequate provisions for prevention, such as criminal record checks for candidates to the priesthood, animators, and pastoral workers, as well as a thorough vetting process for priests arriving from other dioceses or nations before beginning pastoral activities.
- » The Conference acknowledges that there is still need for further work on disseminating and implementing the national safeguarding guidelines.
- » The Commission notes a reporting structure referred to in the guidelines as the “Servizio Interdiocesano per la Tutela dei Minori”. However, this reporting structure has yet to be implemented.
- » There is a lack of safeguarding formation courses available in the local Church.
- » The bishops expressed the need for more professional safeguarding practitioners in the local Church to provide safeguarding formation opportunities, adequately staff reporting structures, and provide robust victim/survivor accompaniment services.
- » The bishops shared their challenges as a small Church with few bishops, multiple rites, and significant diversity.
- » The bishops shared their challenges in collaborating with the civil authorities.
- » The bishops expressed a need to develop a case management protocol that ensures a coherent and transparent approach upon the receipt of a denunciation.
- » The Commission notes the lack of an external audit mechanism to evaluate the local Church’s safeguarding apparatus.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends a comprehensive review of the national safeguarding guidelines by the Commission, with the Conference's active engagement in this process. The review would especially work to ensure that the guidelines reflect recent changes to Church law related to safeguarding, including updates to Book VI of Canon Law and the updated publication of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
2. The national safeguarding guidelines should provide for victims/survivors to be proactively informed of their right to report their case to the civil authorities and be accompanied by the Church in their healing journey, as part of the Church's commitment to reparations.
3. The national safeguarding guidelines should be published in a timely way in each of the ecclesiastical circumscriptions in Greece. The Commission recommends the development of a strategic communications plan to ensure an effective launch and to promote the document's dissemination among the People of God in the local Church. The Commission's Regional Group Europe remains available to accompany such an initiative.
4. The Commission recommends the swift adoption of the Memorare Initiative in Greece. The Commission recommends a follow-up meeting between the Regional Group Europe and Conference leadership to further discuss the adoption of the Memorare Initiative. The Commission welcomes the attendance of Conference-identified safeguarding practitioners already ministering in the local Church, including the Gregorian-trained psychologist from the Archdiocese of Athens. The Memorare Initiative would especially support the implementation of the national safeguarding guidelines document as well as the effective implementation of "Servizio Interdiocesano per la Tutela dei Minori" as the local Church's reporting structure, consistent with *Vos estis lux mundi*. It also would support the provision of initial and ongoing safeguarding formation for bishops, clergy, religious, and the laity. This broader safeguarding campaign should include dedicated accompaniment of victims'/survivors' families who are also subject to pain and suffering in incidents of abuse. The Commission recommends a national safeguarding commission to oversee the Memorare Initiative, comprising representatives from the episcopal conference and the conference of religious — consistent with the Commission-endorsed One Church approach.
5. The bishops should commit additional pastoral agents to specialised and advanced formation in safeguarding.
6. The Conference reports no denunciations to date. However, the absence of reported cases should not be interpreted as an absence of abuse incidents. The swift development of reporting mechanisms that are consistent with accessibility and transparency, as required by *Vos estis lux mundi*, is imperative.
7. The Commission requests more information on the European safeguarding network of which the Archdiocese of Athens is a member, along with more details on the safeguarding events that the archdiocesan schools have hosted.

8. The Commission recommends a structured dialogue between the bishops and the civil authorities around issues of safeguarding. This dialogue can be geared toward identifying common ground and building a further basis for collaboration around safeguarding efforts.
9. The bishops acknowledge the need to develop a case management protocol. The Commission recommends the swift development of this protocol in order to help guide the local Church's response to reports of abuse. The Commission further recommends that the Conference announce an expected publication date, as a commitment to transparency and accountability.
10. An external audit mechanism should be developed and implemented as soon as possible, as part of the local Church's safeguarding apparatus.

Findings from external sources

The Commission notes the following relevant findings from the Committee on the Rights of the Child's periodic review of Greece (last reviewed in 2022):

- » The Government of Greece reported, "School principals, in cooperation with teachers, are called upon to take drastic pedagogic and other initiatives to resolve abuse and violence issues inside and outside the school, involving also parents and others, when required".¹⁹³
- » The Government of Greece reported, "The Hellenic Police Headquarters, through the Electronic Crime Prosecutor's Office, organises workshops across the country, aiming to inform pupils, parents and teachers about the phenomena of online violence, sexual exploitation and abuse of minors, the risks of social networking sites and, in general, the prevention and management of the risks associated with new technologies; 812 Information Days were held in different cities throughout the country in 2011".¹⁹⁴
- » The Association for the Social Support of Youth and ECPAT International (civil society organisations) jointly cited, "Numerous reports of sexual abuse, violent assaults, harassment, and humiliation in [refugee] camps on the Greek islands demonstrate the impact of current living conditions on children's security and safety".¹⁹⁵ The organisations go on to cite "the lack of supportive structures in place for boy victims of child sexual abuse".¹⁹⁶
- » The Defence for Children International Greece (civil society organisation) reported, "The latest data proves that more than 2500 unaccompanied minors on the move are exposed to homelessness and rough living conditions incompatible with their needs and rights as children. Due

¹⁹³ CRC, *Combined fourth to sixth periodic reports submitted under article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (5 March 2020), par. 133, retrieved at [CRC/C/GRC/4-6](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/crc/C/GRC/4-6).

¹⁹⁴ CRC, *Additional information submitted by the State party of Greece* (2020), Annex 7, retrieved at [INT/CRC/ADR/GRC/33313](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/int/CRC/ADR/GRC/33313).

¹⁹⁵ Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS) and ECPAT International, *Supplementary report on "Sexual Exploitation of Children in Greece"* (1 November 2019), par. 10, retrieved at [INT_CRC_NGO_GRC_40834_E](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/int_CRC_NGO_GRC_40834_E).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., par. 40.

to this predicament they are exposed to serious on-going protection risks, sexual exploitation, abuse, and threats of their life”.¹⁹⁷

- » The European Council on Refugees and Exiles, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Greek Council for Refugees (civil society organisations) reported that “a significant number of [unaccompanied and separated migrant children] across the country are exposed to risks, including homelessness, sexual violence and unacceptable living conditions”.¹⁹⁸
- » The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (national human rights institution) reported, “The phenomenon of the gradual passing of the obligation for childhood protection from the State to the private sector should be further pointed out, since in fact, children are often placed in guest houses or community houses belonging to non-profit private law legal entities or in church establishments”.¹⁹⁹
- » The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (national human rights institution) reported, “With regard to alternative care for children in Greece, this is provided by various organisations including public, private and church-run entities, without specific requirements or a formal single procedure of certification provided by law”.²⁰⁰
- » The Greek Ombudsman (national human rights institution) recommended the “thorough investigation and multidisciplinary treatment of cases of sexual violence (and other serious cases of domestic violence) against minors, development of specific designated areas based on international standards for the examination of child victims and witnesses, examination of child victims from police personnel together with competent health and welfare services....”²⁰¹
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about “the lack of standards for care provision and the insufficient review of placements, despite the high number of placements managed by private institutions and the church”.²⁰²
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about “the rise in the number of cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including in relation to child sexual abuse material, within the circle of trust and with regard to migrant children, while data to assess the magnitude of the phenomenon is lacking”.²⁰³
- » The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about “the low rates of intervention, investigation, prosecution, and conviction in cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse”.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷ Defence for Children International Greece, *Periodic Review of Greece* (31 October 2019), p. 8, retrieved at [INT_CRC_NGO_GRC_40835_E](#).

¹⁹⁸ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, the International Commission of Jurists, and the Greek Council for Refugees, *Alternative report to the fourth to sixth periodic report of Greece* (10–14 February 2020), par. 4, retrieved at [INT_CRC_NGO_GRC_40836_E](#).

¹⁹⁹ Greek National Commission for Human Rights, *Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child* (January 2020), p. 32, retrieved at [INT/CRC/IFN/GRC/41287](#).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁰¹ Greek Ombudsman, *Parallel Report on UNCRC Greece* (1 November 2019), p. 17, retrieved at [INT_CRC_IFN_GRC_40862_E](#).

²⁰² CRC, *Concluding observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Greece* (28 June 2022), par. 30(b), retrieved at [CRC/C/GRC/CO/4-6](#).

²⁰³ Ibid., par. 26(b).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., par. 26(e).



BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION OF ST. GABRIEL – MONFORTAINS (MALE)

Profile

The Brothers of Christian Instruction of St. Gabriel (otherwise known as the Monfortain Brothers of St. Gabriel) is a male religious congregation of pontifical rite, with 1,145 members, 867 of which are below the age of 70 years old. It is a congregation of religious brothers, i.e., non-clerics. The Congregation's charism focuses primarily on youth education in missionary countries.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Central Administration is committed to further developing the Congregation's safeguarding regime, especially its guidelines document.
- » The Commission was invited to address the Congregation's 2024 General Chapter meeting.
- » The International Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission is in charge of the safeguarding dossier on behalf of the Central Administration and is led by its General Councilor.
- » The Congregation-wide safeguarding guidelines, “Guidelines for Protection of Minors”, were published in 2015. The Commission notes that these guidelines include certain good practices, such as 1) the establishment of an obligation for every confrere to report any abuse of minors of which he becomes aware, including the obligation to receive all reports benevolently and put them in writing so that they can be filed and tracked; 2) protections for whistleblowers; 3) provisions for expert intervention in each individual case; 4) a provision for full cooperation with civil authorities in case the crime is also prosecuted civilly; and 5) an emphasis on the need for a code of conduct to be present and enforced throughout the Congregation.
- » The Congregation intends to review and update their Congregation-wide safeguarding regime, and further plans to establish a specific commission within the Central Administration for the protection of minors, with a duly prepared and trained person in charge.
- » In 2021, the Central Administration sent out a circular letter requesting all the provinces to update their guidelines based on changes in Universal Law.
- » In 2022, the Central Administration's sent out a circular letter requesting all the provinces to submit their updated policies and a list of members of their provincial safeguarding committees.
- » The Congregation has 17 safeguarding officials around the world, consisting of the provincial superiors in collaboration with the General Councilor of the JPIC Commission. The tenure as a safeguarding official is three years. The nomination of the General Councilor of the JPIC Commission is carried out by the Superior General. The General Councilor's main responsibilities include accompanying the provinces in updating their guidelines and offering specific training for provincial safeguarding officers. The Superior General is said to ultimately be responsible for ensuring that cases are followed up at the provincial level by the major superiors and those responsible for safeguarding, in accordance with canonical and civil norms.
- » Formation opportunities are offered in 17 countries where the Congregation operates, and in three different languages.

- » There are listening centres in several of the Congregation's educational institutions, especially the larger ones. These listening centres, where reports can be received by expert staff, are reserved for students and families.
- » The *ad hoc* establishment of a Committee on Recognition and Reparations for victims/survivors in France, in response to the Sauv  report.²⁰⁵ This Committee addressed considerations for both financial and nonfinancial reparations.
- » Nonfinancial reparations under way include collaboration with the victims' advocacy group created for the prevention of abuse in the Church of the West of France, and a university study to investigate the root causes of the abuse and the misconduct of the religious superiors at the time.
- » The aforementioned University study, which initially was to be carried out only by the Congregation, will now be done in partnership with the Diocese of Lu on. This represents a meaningful collaboration between the Congregation and the Diocese, consistent with a One Church approach to safeguarding.
- » Alleged perpetrators are provided adequate moral, spiritual, and psychological support through a competent person who can also act as a liaison with the investigator and the religious superiors at the different stages of the proceedings. During the proceedings, the alleged perpetrator is reportedly prevented from repeating the alleged crime, having contact with the alleged victim/survivor, or interfering with the investigation.
- » Initial formation includes an emphasis placed on human formation, particularly in its psychological and sexual dimensions, and on affective formation. Any personal problems in the affective and sexual sphere that might give rise to possible problems in the future are evaluated. A General Counsellor is delegated for the formation of novices and is assisted by an international formation committee.
- » When there are training sessions for new provincial superiors, there have been specific training sessions on child protection. Members of the General Council also participate in these sessions.
- » The Congregation is in contact with diocesan and national religious conferences and occasionally participates in their trainings regarding child protection.
- » The Congregation officially acknowledged 167 victims/survivors of abuse in the Province of Canada, after which the Congregation acted on requests from victims/survivors for specific reparations. First, the Congregation sent a letter of apology to each of the victims. Second, the Congregation provided financial reparations based on the amount established by the civil judge overseeing the cases.
- » The Congregation provided financial reparations to approximately 40 victims/survivors in the Province of France according to the directives of the "Commission Reconnaissance et R paration".²⁰⁶ The Congregation also works closely on reparations with AMPASEO (L'association pour

la m moire et la pr vention des abus sexuels dans l' glise de l'Ouest), a victims' advocacy organisation. Information on joint activities can be found on AMPASEO's online blog.²⁰⁷ The Commission notes that the publication of these activities represents a meaningful form of reparations through a commitment to transparency.

• Challenges

- » The Commission notes certain deficiencies in the Congregation-wide guidelines, including 1) a lack of clarity on the qualifications and profile that members of the provincial safeguarding committees must have; 2) a lack of references to vocational formation and discernment; 3) a lack of references to canonical norms that could make the definitions therein more properly grounded in canon law; and 4) a lack of provisions for prevention in promoting a culture of safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes the lack of a unified and binding safeguarding guidelines document for the whole Congregation. Instead, the Congregation has a set of guidelines that it uses to help inform the individual provinces in the development of their own guidelines.
- » The Central Administration has yet to compile all the updated provincial policies and lists of members of the provincial safeguarding committees, despite the circular letter's issuance over two years ago.
- » The Commission notes the Congregation's lack of data on its provision of safeguarding formation courses for its members.
- » The Commission notes the lack of a dedicated safeguarding budget at the Congregation.
- » The Congregation expressed concern about the lack of a safeguarding coordination mechanism at the central level.
- » The Commission notes the Congregation's current inability to reach out to victims/survivors of abuse in Canada, where there is an ongoing class action lawsuit, and where the judicial system does not permit the Congregation's leadership to meet with victims.
- » The Congregation acknowledges that in those dioceses where the Congregation plays an important role in education and training, the Congregation could promote a greater culture of safeguarding.
- » The Commission notes a cultural resistance to safeguarding in some countries where the Congregation ministers, especially in the Global South and Asia/Oceania.
- » The Commission emphasises the importance of safeguarding in the Congregation, given their charism to provide youth education. The Commission notes that this charism places thousands of children in the Congregation's care.

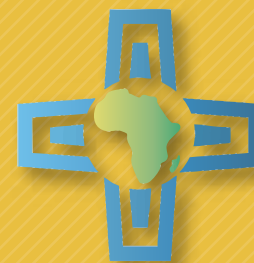
²⁰⁵ Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (CIASE), *Sexual Violence in the Catholic Church France 1950 – 2020: Summary of the Final Report* (2021), retrieved at <https://www.ciase.fr/medias/Ciase-Summary-of-the-Final-Report-5-october-2021.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ See <https://www.reconnaissancereparation.org/>.

²⁰⁷ See <https://www.helloasso.com/associations/ampaseo>.

Recommendations

1. The Congregation-wide safeguarding guidelines document should be reviewed and updated to reflect recent changes in Universal Law, consistent with the Congregation's expressed desire to update their safeguarding guideline document to produce a unified and Congregation-wide document. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative, with the use of the *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
2. The Congregation should support the Memorare Initiative in the various missionary countries in which it ministers.
3. The Commission recommends urgent attention to ensuring the prompt compiling of all updated provincial policies and lists of members of the provincial safeguarding committees, as originally requested in the 2022 circular letter from the Central Administration.
4. Robust data collection on safeguarding formation courses offered to the Congregation's members.
5. The Central Administration should establish a safeguarding coordination mechanism with a dedicated budget.
6. The Commission recommends the timely appointment of a Safeguarding Official within the Central Administration, consistent with the Congregation's stated intention to do so. That individual's name and contact information should be published on the Congregation's website, along with a description of the Safeguarding Official's specific responsibilities and mandate.
7. Ongoing safeguarding formation should be provided for provincial major superiors at the beginning of their mandate and during their terms in office.
8. The Commission requests clarification on the reasons for the Congregation's decision to decentralise its guidelines and procedures to the provincial level.



MISSIONARY SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF AFRICA (FEMALE)

Profile

The Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa is a female religious congregation of pontifical rite. The Congregation currently has 395 members, 108 of whom are under the age of 70 years old.

• Safeguarding overview

The Commission notes:

- » The Congregation's primary safeguarding document, "Sexual Abuse Policy", was published in 2014. This document contains provisions for the prevention and handling of sexual abuse cases in contexts where the Congregation's apostolate is carried out. The Commission notes an important differentiation among the various figures and responsible parties, as described in this document. The Commission also notes the presence of a code of conduct within the safeguarding document.
- » There is a provision in the Congregation's safeguarding apparatus for a person dedicated to public communications, as a commitment to transparency, especially in relation to victims/survivors. This is a good practice.
- » A Congregation-wide safeguarding team comprises three sisters, who are appointed by the General Council. The safeguarding officers' role is to investigate any complaints.
- » Safeguarding formation courses are offered in ten countries where the Congregation ministers.
- » Safeguarding formation is offered in four languages: English, French, Kishwahili, and Chichewa.
- » The Congregation provided financial support for two projects that are primarily dedicated to promoting the rights of abused children.
- » The Congregation reports no cases of abuse or neglect within its ranks.
- » The Congregation's code of conduct is signed by all members and women in formation.
- » The Congregation has a separate code of conduct for formators and animators.
- » The Congregation expressed its openness to the Commission's accompaniment in the review of its guidelines.
- » The Congregation publishes its congregation-wide safeguarding office email address.²⁰⁸
- » Congregation-wide training was conducted during the original roll-out of the safeguarding policies. Postulants and novices undergo the same introductory training.
- » A five-day safeguarding session was held for novices.
- » A safeguarding session was held for sisters preparing for their perpetual commitment.

²⁰⁸ Email address: msolasgcare@msolafrika.org.

- » The Congregation's Safeguarding Delegate and the General Superior attended formation hosted by the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).
- » Formators and leadership receive other safeguarding training offered by local religious associations.
- » Two sisters completed the safeguarding diploma programme at the Pontifical Gregorian University.
- » There is a safeguarding delegate for the Congregation.
- » There is a collaboration around safeguarding in Kenya with the Association of Sisterhoods in Kenya.
- » There are some collaborations between the Congregation and various dioceses in which the Congregation ministers to children, including "Protection of Children in the Streets" in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi; a rescue home for sexually abused children in the Diocese of Malindi, Kenya; and a daycare for small at-risk children in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

• Challenges

- » There is no defined limit placed on the appointment for members of the Congregation's safeguarding team.
- » The Congregation's safeguarding policy dates to 2014, and therefore does not reflect recent changes to Universal Law regarding safeguarding issues. This document is actively under review. The Commission notes some inaccurate and unclear definitions in this document. The Commission also notes concern that the guidelines unnecessarily provide for the disposal of documents regarding cases that were not carried forward after a period of five years.
- » Certain provisions for victim/survivor accompaniment are reserved for "proven cases". The Commission notes concern that this might deprive victims/survivors of accompaniment services while their cases are still pending.
- » The Commission notes the need for assurance of the impartiality and transparency of the Congregation's current reporting procedures.
- » There is a lack of clear public criteria for the Congregation's safeguarding officers.
- » There is no ongoing safeguarding formation course for the Congregation's members.
- » The process of appointing a safeguarding formation coordinator for the Congregation is ongoing.
- » The Congregation expressed concerns about the lack of clear reporting structures and safeguarding guidelines at the provincial level.
- » The Congregation expressed concerns about the challenges around a culture of silence that inhibits the reporting of abuse.
- » The Congregation expressed concerns about a lack of collaboration on safeguarding with some of its partners.

- » The Congregation expressed concerns about a lack of sensitisation among some of its members regarding the safeguarding guidelines and case management system.
- » The Congregation expressed concerns regarding a lack of clarity among some of its members regarding the safeguarding delegate's role.
- » The Commission notes the lack of a robust vetting process for candidates to membership in the Congregation.

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends defining and publicizing the selection criteria and length of appointment for members of the safeguarding team, along with protocols for the team's work and decision-making.
2. The Commission recommends that the Congregation engage the Commission for a comprehensive review of the Congregation's safeguarding guidelines and commit to a swift timeline for the completion of this review. The Commission further recommends 1) publicizing the timeline, 2) involving victims/survivors of abuse in the revision process, and 3) incorporating a risk management philosophy to underpin the guidelines.
3. The Congregation should amend the current provision in its guidelines regarding document disposal to ensure permanent retention of documents, as a commitment to the integrity of the Congregation's archives.
4. The Commission requests copies of the two codes of conduct that the Congregation has in place for its members, formators, and animators.
5. The name and contact information of the safeguarding delegate should be published on the Congregation's website — along with a clear definition and dissemination of the safeguarding delegate's role in the Congregation.
6. Ongoing safeguarding formation should be provided for all Congregation members.
7. The Commission invites the Congregation's collaboration in and endorsement of the Memorare Initiative in its provinces, to encourage its adoption in the local Churches where the Congregation ministers.
8. All persons collaborating with the Congregation should be required to sign the code of conduct.
9. A comprehensive vetting process should be developed for candidates to membership in the Congregation.
10. An external audit mechanism should be developed as an ordinary part of the Congregation's safeguarding regime.

11. The Commission kindly requests examples from the Congregation of its experiences with the concept of reparations. Importantly, as covered in the Conversional Justice Introduction to this Annual Report, the Commission emphasises the broad range of practices that are included in the concept of reparations, and is not limited to the provision of financial damages. Therefore, the Commission welcomes the Congregation's wisdom on how the local Churches can accompany the repair of harm caused to victims/survivors of sexual abuse in the Church. Such a contribution will contribute to the Commission's ongoing study, across the Universal Church.

Section 2

The Church's Safeguarding Mission in the Continental Regions

This section of the Annual Report captures the Church's important safeguarding dynamics at the regional level. It observes and analyses how local Churches build solidarity and communion around their safeguarding ministry through regional efforts and initiatives. It seeks to delineate positive trends and challenges that apply across the local Churches in a given region. This section is organised by the Commission's four regions, namely Africa, Asia/Oceania, the Americas, and Europe.

»»» Data sources

Regional Group Analysis. The most significant part of the data presented in this section derives from the Regional Group members' direct experience and knowledge. Members of the Commission's Regional Groups include experts from across various disciplines, enabling a powerful multidisciplinary perspective. Their day-to-day activities as local safeguarding experts enable an organic and ongoing data collection over the course of the reporting period. The Regional Groups are also assisted by a Regional Expert and often by Regional Advisors, who are also members of the Commission's personnel. These Regional Experts and Advisors closely follow initiatives and developments across the region to gain perspective on the developing safeguarding trends and activities under way. Many of these Regional Group members and Regional Experts are also in regular contact with victims/survivors at the local level.

In the data collection phase, the Commission's Annual Report Team issues a standard questionnaire to each Regional Group, requesting information on the progress and challenges that regional members and personnel have observed in their ordinary engagements on a daily basis. Answers to these questionnaires are consolidated to map the region's safeguarding trends.

Consultations with Regional Episcopal Federations and Associations. The Commission's Regional Groups regularly engage with the various regional groupings of episcopal conferences. They meet formally with regional leadership and on an *ad hoc* basis during collective regional events. These ordinary and ongoing interactions provide important insights into the trends presented in this section. These insights are especially valuable given the unique knowledge that the regional groupings of bishops

can offer. The Annual Report Team, in close collaboration with the specific Regional Groups, occasionally solicits formal contributions from these regional episcopal groupings as part of the data collection for this section.

Responses to these requests are coded to further map the region's safeguarding trends and challenges. With careful and respectful regard for the significant diversity across regions, the Commission extracts the most significant and consistent regional trends for inclusion in this section.

Open-Access Publications. The Commission's various Regional Groups, in close collaboration with the Annual Report Team, conduct an annual mapping of publications that provide relevant commentary on the Church's regional trends in safeguarding. These publications include studies from academia, international organisations, independent investigatory bodies, and specific religious congregations or episcopal conferences. Findings from these publications are evaluated by the Regional Groups to be included in the analysis presented in this section.

Journalistic Articles. The Commission's various Regional Groups, in close collaboration with the Commission's Communications Team, conduct an ongoing mapping of journalistic articles that shed light on specific safeguarding issues within the local Churches. Findings from this mapping are coded to provide additional contributions that the Regional Group deems important to include in this section.

»»» Drafting, review, and finalisation of the text

The preparation of the text follows much the same process described in Section 1 for the country analyses. Findings from the data collection effort are consolidated by the Commission's Annual Report Team into a draft text (*Instrumentum Laboris*). This draft text is presented at the Commission's Fall Plenary Assembly of the year under review for the Commission's approval to proceed. During the subsequent synodal phase, the Annual Report Team meets individually with the Commission's regional members and personnel to discuss any amendments to the proposed text.

Upon conclusion of the synodal phase, the Annual Report Team revises the text and then presents it to the Spring Plenary Assembly of the year following the reporting year, for the Commission's approval. The content of the text then proceeds to a final series of consultations with the Commission's stakeholders in the Roman Curia. Consistent with the Conversional Justice framework, the Commission uses the Annual Report as a tool for dialogue with key partners in the Universal Church to promote the ongoing conversion toward a culture of safeguarding, as encouraged by Pope Francis.



• Positive trends

- » The *Conférence Épiscopale de l'Océan Indien (CEDOI)* held a safeguarding conference in Mauritius from 12–17 February 2024, with 21 participants from 12 different francophone countries in the region.
- » The Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) held a capacity-building workshop in South Africa from 26 February to 1 March 2024, which included the participation of 6 bishops, 9 secretaries-general, and 19 persons responsible for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults at the conference level.
- » The Missionaries of Africa (MAF) held a safeguarding training event in Rwanda from 17–30 June 2024, which included 25 of the MAF's safeguarding delegates from 17 different countries.
- » The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) held a capacity-building event, which included the participation of 26 Church leaders from AMECEA's affiliate countries. This event concluded with commitments from each of the Church leaders that they would implement upon return to their local Churches. This demonstrates a powerful practice of how to build regional momentum around safeguarding.
- » A new paradigm of safeguarding formation is developing that emphasises the evangelising dimension of safeguarding. That is, the region is developing a deeper understanding that there is a profound relationship between evangelisation and safeguarding and that addressing the scourge of abuse at its root is an immense work of evangelisation.
- » Three countries in the region, namely Kenya, Ghana, and Malawi, have confirmed that they are currently reviewing their safeguarding guidelines.
- » An increased awareness and sensitisation to recent changes to *Vos estis lux mundi* and Book VI of the Code of Canon Law is encouraging the region's episcopal conferences to begin plans for a formal updating of their safeguarding guidelines.
- » Several countries are currently translating their safeguarding guidelines into more accessible local languages.
- » The Church's promotion of affordable rehabilitation centres and prevention programmes for those suffering from alcoholism and addiction disorders helps to address the risks of abuse perpetrated by individuals with these medical disorders.
- » The government care reforms in Africa represent a significant shift in prioritising child welfare and protection. Driven by increased awareness of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, governments have enacted more robust child protection laws, strengthened institutions, and fostered collaboration through their government agencies, non-profits, and Church institutions. These reforms are evident in initiatives such as deinstitutionalisation, the establishment of child

protection systems, and the promotion of alternative care options. Given the substantial number of care institutions owned and run by the Catholic Church across the continent, the Church is actively engaged in training staff to align with these government reforms, ensuring that its services complement and support broader child welfare goals.

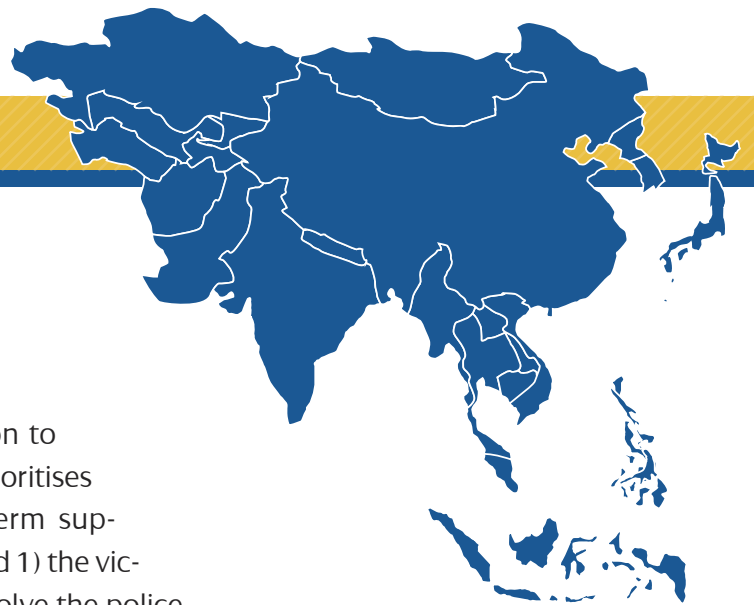
- » Several Church initiatives in the region are contributing to the region's care reforms. The Associations of Women Religious of Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Malawi, through Catholic Care for Children in Kenya (CCCK), are promoting care reforms by uniting the efforts of its member congregations and clergy to champion a continuum of care that prioritises holistic family- and community-based support for vulnerable children. AMECEA, in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), is promoting the AMECEA Catholic Care for Children (CCC) Programme that advocates for holistic care for children in the AMECEA member countries.
- » The Church in Africa has a robust education and health system that complements government efforts to provide high-quality social services to the citizenry. Most of these institutions serve the marginalised in society. Educational institutions with millions of children and young people are therefore great opportunities for safeguarding and child protection interventions, contributing to a culture of safeguarding in the Church across the region.
- » The local Church in Zimbabwe has agreed to undertake the *Universal Guidelines Framework* Pilot Project.
- » The region's familiarity with transitional justice principles (from national transitional justice processes) makes the local Churches well equipped for the Commission's application of Conversational Justice in addressing abuse.

• Challenges

- » With the rise of technology in Africa, the Catholic Church is dealing with new forms of abuse, including cyberbullying, where children are targeted with intimidating or threatening messages online, and online grooming, where perpetrators use social media platforms to contact children for sexual exploitation. The production and distribution of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) material online is a growing trend, especially with the use of mobile phones. These developments are a concern to many bishops in the region.
- » The Church in Africa is concerned about growing interconnected societal forms of abuse that expose children and vulnerable adults to compounding risks. These interconnected forms of abuse include rising cases of human trafficking targeting children and vulnerable adults, recruitment to gangs, radicalisation, and alcohol and drug abuse among children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- » Africa's developmental challenges intersect with complex factors that contribute significantly to abuse in the region, particularly within families. Poverty, inequality, climate change, migration, internal displacement, and rapid urbanisation create an environment easily prone to exploitation, neglect, and violence that often lead to economic hardship, family instability, and increased vulnerability. The Catholic Church in Africa recognises the family as the foundational unit of society. The Regional Group emphasises that the priority for safeguarding initiatives must be at the family

level to create a culture of care. By focusing on poverty alleviation, community empowerment, and support services for vulnerable families, the Church can adopt an integral approach to safeguarding, creating resilient communities and better preventing abuse.

- » A lack of trust in civil authorities affects victims'/survivors' willingness to report their cases. The Church in Africa strongly advocates for good governance and government policies that provide access to high-quality education, robust judicial systems, healthcare, job opportunities, and self-reliance for all. The lack thereof increases the risks of abuse.
- » Political violence has led to refugees and internally displaced persons, especially involving children. Additionally, natural disasters such as floods and drought are of concern as society looks to the Church for support. Victims of these crises are vulnerable to abuse.
- » The language of safeguarding is often overly complicated or not culturally relevant. This affects its adoption and inculturation in the local Churches.
- » LGBTQ issues are extremely politically charged in Africa, preventing meaningful and important conversations about this vulnerable population.
- » Many countries in the region have a national safeguarding desk, while others remain reliant on diocesan safeguarding reporting structures. This disparity poses certain risks associated with the often-limited diocesan resources that are available for safeguarding.
- » There are persistent challenges regarding a lack of data collection and/or literacy in the local Churches, with implications for safeguarding.
- » The concept of reparations for cases of abuse is not widely developed or understood across the region's local Churches. The gap in understanding of the concept of reparations positions the African Church at the early stages of promoting reparations as part of its safeguarding ministry.
- » There is a need for research into humane means of reparation for both victims/survivors and their families. The Regional Group especially notes the need for a study of the efficacy of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, as a form of reparations in the region.
- » The Regional Group recognises that reparation should be aimed at restoring the integral human dignity of victims/survivors, as opposed to a sole focus on financial compensation. Therefore, the Regional Group explicitly notes the urgent need for the local Churches to establish a fund to cover the costs associated with comprehensive reparations, especially the provision of professional psychological and medical treatment.
- » The Regional Group notes obstacles to the provision of reparations when the family of the victim/survivor is prioritised over the victims/survivors themselves. In these instances, there is a significant risk that victims/survivors will be left to struggle alone emotionally.



• Positive trends

- » There is a promising application of the principle of reparation in the Catholic Church in Tonga. Reparation, in this context, extends beyond mere financial compensation to embrace a culturally sensitive approach that prioritises communal healing, forgiveness, and long-term support. This particular path of reparation included 1) the victim and her grandparents choosing not to involve the police, a decision that was respected by the school and Church authorities; 2) the Church's immediate provision of ongoing support to the victim through professional counselling sessions; 3) the local bishop and the Catholic school board utilising the traditional Tongan practice of *Hu Louifi*, whereby these Church representatives visited the victim's family to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the Church; 4) the Church's continuing support to the victim by ensuring that she completed her education and found employment; 5) the Church arranging counselling for the perpetrator's family; 6) the Church arranging counselling sessions for the perpetrator, which included an apology letter that the perpetrator wrote to the victim; and 7) the submitting of a report to the local bishop, which led to the perpetrator being asked to leave the teaching profession.
- » The local Church in Tonga has agreed to undertake the *Universal Guidelines Framework* (UGF) Pilot Project. This effort, coupled with the adoption of a Memorare Initiative in Tonga, is a major development for the region as it represents strong leadership to build momentum around the regional Church's activities in safeguarding. The UGF Pilot Project aims to create a comprehensive safeguarding framework that includes prevention, response, and support mechanisms within Church communities, in a local Church that has limited resources and minimally documented protocols. Upon evaluation, this pilot model could be replicated in other local Churches around the region.
- » In January 2024, meetings were held in the Philippines with representatives from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and the Conferences for Religious (both men and women) to discuss safeguarding strategies and the development of localised safeguarding protocols. These meetings laid the foundation for more coordinated regional efforts and have paved the way for the planning of a safeguarding summit to be held in the Philippines in 2025.
- » Growing momentum around the Memorare Initiative in the region, including meetings with representatives from bishops' conferences in the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Japan, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, Samoa, and South Korea. These discussions centered around strengthening safeguarding policies, promoting a culture of safeguarding, and sharing good practices on abuse prevention and response.

- » A National Symposium on Human Dignity and Pastoral Care was held at St. Pius X College in India from 17–19 November 2023. This symposium focused on the theological, ethical, canonical, and legal perspectives of pastoral care for minors and victims of injustice. The *Universal Guidelines Framework* was presented, emphasising the need for a holistic safeguarding culture.
- » A four-day workshop was held in Fiji with approximately 90 students and members of the staff from the Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva, Fiji. The participants came from almost all the islands of Oceania and Pacific. This was a powerful opportunity to build solidarity and share views on the diverse realities of the local Churches across the various Pacific Islands.
- » Safeguarding training was provided for newly appointed bishops in South Asia.
- » Many countries in Asia have developed their own child protection policies in line with directives from the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These policies are foundational in establishing a uniform approach to safeguarding while also being culturally sensitive.
- » The Church in the region is increasingly focused on capacity building, regular training, and education on safeguarding at all levels, from clergy to lay people. This focus is critical for fostering a culture of zero tolerance and proactive prevention.

• Challenges

- » There is a lack of publicly available information on cases of abuse in the region. The Regional Group emphasises the need for the Memorare Initiative in the region for precisely this reason. The Memorare Initiative will pursue victim/survivor support and accompaniment, working toward a compassionate, victim-centered approach, clear reporting, and robust documentation practices, while promoting due process and justice.
- » The region is characterised by deeply rooted traditions, hierarchical structures, and a prevailing culture of silence, which have historically limited awareness and open discussion about abuse within local Churches.
- » Many dioceses and religious communities are still in the early stages of fully grasping the complexities of abuse, both in terms of the dynamics involved and the necessary responses required for effective safeguarding. This context necessitates a patient, relationship-driven approach, focusing heavily on building trust, raising awareness, and fostering an understanding of the issue at a grassroots level.
- » There is a cultural tendency, especially in the Pacific Islands, to undervalue the importance of documenting processes and procedures. Yet safeguarding and Conversional Justice stress the importance of documentation to promote transparency and accountability.
- » The Regional Group notes concern with a lack of attention to the management of perpetrators, especially in small communities such as in the Pacific Islands, where victims/survivors will likely see their abusers again.

• Positive trends

- » The *ad limina* visits have been a privileged opportunity for dialogue between the Commission and the episcopal conferences of the region.
- » A safeguarding formation event was held by Caritas Latin America, in partnership with the Commission, on 26 February to 1 March 2024 in Rome. The participants included a group of 9 national Caritas bishop-Presidents from Latin America and the Caribbean and 11 national Caritas directors. The exchange of knowledge and experiences between the bishop-Presidents and national Caritas directors is a positive trend in the region, where close collaboration allows for the sharing of good practices and increased solidarity in the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.
- » The Diocese of Rawson signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Memorare Initiative on 6 March 2024. A first formation session was subsequently held for all members of the various diocesan abuse-prevention commissions of the Patagonian region, which includes six dioceses. The Regional Group welcomes the synodal nature of this activity emerging from the Memorare Initiative in the Diocese of Rawson. Training for Church authorities and other pastoral agents has been aimed at reinforcing active listening and a commitment to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to victims/survivors and their families.
- » In March, the III Latin American Congress on Vulnerability, organized by CEPROME, was held in Panama City, Panama. The Congress hosted around 450 participants from 18 countries in the region.
- » In July, the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) held a course in Panama City, Panama, for bishops from Central America and the Andes, on strategic and crisis communication.
- » In Brazil, the Núcleo Lux Mundi (CRB and CNBB) has reached more than 6,000 people through initiatives involving dozens of partners from the Brazilian Church. Among the activities, courses in collaboration with CELAM, CLAR, and PUCPR stand out, in which 150 Brazilian congregations and dioceses received training. It should be noted that the Núcleo Lux Mundi is part of a coalition that brings together more than 70 civil society institutions.
- » The local Church in Costa Rica has agreed to undertake the *Universal Guidelines Framework* Pilot Project.
- » In June 2025, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' published the 2024 Annual Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,²⁰⁹ which included information on reparations provided to victims/survivors.

²⁰⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *2024 Annual Report: Findings and Recommendations; Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (June 2025), retrieved at [https://www.usccb.org/resources/2024%20CYP%20Annual%20Report%20\(Digital\).pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/2024%20CYP%20Annual%20Report%20(Digital).pdf).



- » CELAM convened the II Meeting of those responsible for the prevention of abuse in the episcopal conferences of Latin America and the Caribbean. From September 3 to 5, 18 episcopal conferences gathered at the CELAM headquarters in Bogotá, Colombia.
- » Regional proposals were launched by the Latin American Network for a Culture of Care, whose members are part of various commissions and national offices of the region's episcopal conferences and are sponsored by CELAM.
- » Existing practices of reparations in Latin America are diverse. In many cases, an apology, either public or private, is also demanded. In addition, victims/survivors request that the institution responsible for the abuses investigate what happened, that the crime affecting them be acknowledged and condemned, and that they be provided with psychological support. Provisions for institutional reform and nonrecurrence include the creation, publication, and/or improvement of safeguarding protocols aimed at prevention, protection, and care for affected persons, as well as appropriate codes of conduct. Victims/survivors from some parts of the region demand the elimination of any public recognition of the perpetrator and reject any homage or public praise of the person. Examples of reparations in the region include public gestures of memorialisation by the Church to remember the injustices suffered, notably the abuses suffered by victims/survivors at the hands of Jesuit Fr. Renato Poblete in Chile.
- » A significant example of reparations can also be found in Canada, with the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the commitments made by the Corporation of Catholic Entities Party to the Indian Residential School Settlement (CCEPIRSS).²¹⁰

• Challenges

- » On 2 April 2024, the Commission met with the Board of Directors of the Deaf Catholic Youth Initiative for the Americas (DCYIA). The Regional Group notes from this meeting that educators and sign language interpreters in the deaf community are generally not trained to deal adequately with the disclosure of sexual abuse suffered by children and adolescents in the deaf population. Among the most common problems faced by this population is grooming, which leads to sexual abuse, often by the interpreters themselves. Only 30 percent of the parents of deaf children know sign language, which leads them to develop a great trust in their interpreters, leading in turn to increased risks.
- » The Regional Group notes some local Churches in Latin America have expressed their willingness to set concrete plans for the review of their policies and procedures through impartial external organisations.
- » The Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro and an Official of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith made a two-day canonical visit to Paraguay to investigate the case of alleged sexual harassment of a Catholic University student, reported in 2019.
- » In a publicly released communiqué, the Bolivian Episcopal Conference reported having received the visit of an Official of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith to investigate deficient handling of multiple cases.

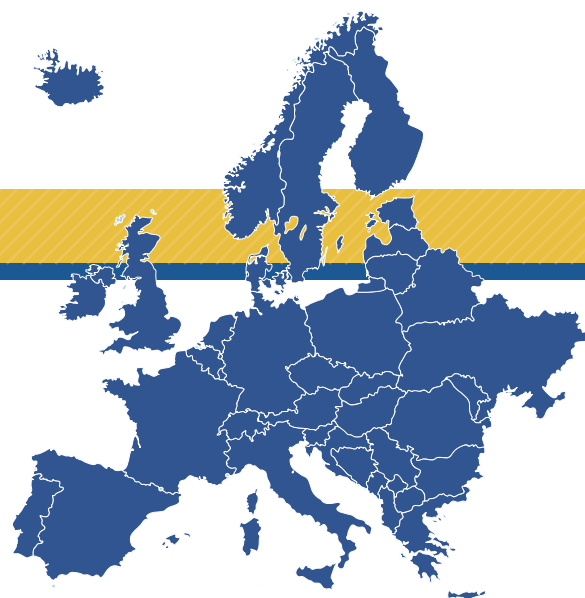
²¹⁰ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), *Canada's Bishops Provide Update on Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement* (2021), retrieved at <https://www.cccb.ca/indigenous-peoples/indian-residential-schools-and-trc/canadas-bishops-provide-update-on-indian-residential-school-settlement-agreement/>.

- » The Regional Group notes Pope Francis's order for a canonical visitation to the *Sodalitium Christianae Vitae* in Peru. The Adjunct Secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and an Official of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith were sent to investigate, beginning on 25 July 2024. The *Sodalitium Christianae Vitae* was a lay group founded by Luis Figari Rodrigo. The investigation resulted in Luis Figari Rodrigo's expulsion from the organization, by a Decree issued by the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.²¹¹

EUROPE

• Positive trends

- » The Bishops' Conference of Belgium has demonstrated meaningful engagement with the Commission in follow-up to the publication of the pilot Annual Report (with reporting period 2023). The sustained and substantive dialogue sets an important standard and example for episcopal conferences that are covered in the Commission's Annual Report on a rotating basis. The Commission is pleased by the Conference's responsiveness and attentiveness to the applicable recommendations on its journey of ongoing conversion to a safer Church. This includes the Conference's proactiveness in proposing a more structured dialogue with the Commission, especially aimed at both sharing and receiving good practices, consistent with its overall strategic safeguarding plan.
- » There have been developments toward an integral approach to safeguarding that emphasises child dignity and links safeguarding to gospel values. In Hungary, the Human Dignity Strategy,²¹² developed by the conferences of religious orders, aims to establish a comprehensive framework for preserving human dignity, with a focus on child protection and the rights of vulnerable adults. It involves creating guidelines, training programmes, and a support system for religious institutions.
- » A further commitment to stable safeguarding structures in many of the local Churches is seen in Austria, where the Bishops' Conference has adopted a proactive approach to evaluating the effectiveness of preventive measures implemented in recent years. At biannual meetings, all organisations involved discuss outstanding issues, ensuring that the system remains robust and effective. This systematic evaluation process underscores the commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation. The local Church in Croatia has established the Bishops' National



Safeguarding Office, marking a significant step in formalising its safeguarding efforts. Although still in the initial development phase, the office is focused on preparing material, producing guidelines, and translating Holy See documents on penal matters. In England and Wales, the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) has engaged LimeCulture, a leading national sexual violence and safeguarding organization, to develop a new risk assessment model that includes a tailored risk and needs assessment tool and a sexual misconduct risk management framework. This initiative is supported by a training programme aimed at equipping key stakeholders with the skills necessary for effective risk management and decision-making.

- » Meaningful efforts at reparations are taking shape in the region. The episcopal conference in Portugal has been addressing past abuses and has set up a compensation fund for victims.²¹³ Approved by the Portuguese Episcopal Conference and the Conference of Religious Institutes of Portugal, the compensation fund aims to offer reparations to victims, including children and vulnerable adults, as a gesture of solidarity and acknowledgement of their suffering. The process involves two commissions: the Instruction Commission, which evaluates compensation requests and establishes the facts, and the Compensation Fixation Commission, which determines the compensation amounts based on various criteria such as the nature and severity of the abuse, the relationship between the victim/survivor and the abuser, and the impact on the victim/survivor. The fund has been established to support this effort with contributions from dioceses and religious institutes.
- » The local Church in Germany has a procedure for reparation and redress to acknowledge and compensate affected individuals, offering both recognition of suffering and financial benefits. All German dioceses participate in this system, along with approximately 70 religious orders, out of around 100 religious orders with known cases of sexual abuse. The average compensation amount is 25,000–30,000 euros, and about 10 percent of recipients receive 150,000 to 250,000 euros. The total compensation has amounted to approximately 40 million euros. A group of 12 individuals, consisting of psychologists and other professionals outside the church, determines the compensation amounts. In addition to financial compensation, other financial support such as paid therapies and individual benefits for cases of hardship is also provided. Some individuals receive funds for specific needs like a retreat, therapy dog, or other personal support. These benefits are tailored to each individual's needs and are not universally distributed.
- » Aligning with recommendations from the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE), the local Church in France is also implementing reparation mechanisms, including compensation funds for victims/survivors, reflecting a holistic approach to justice and healing. This is occurring primarily through the *Instance nationale indépendante de reconnaissance et réparation (INIRR)*.²¹⁴ Also in France, the *Missions Étrangères de Paris* commissioned an audit report that was published in November 2024, as a commitment to reparations through recognition and transparency.²¹⁵
- » Spain has established a collaborative framework between the Spanish Episcopal Conference and the Spanish Religious Conference (CONFER) to support victims/survivors and implement sys-

²¹¹ The organization itself was subsequently dissolved.

²¹² Office for Hungarian Order Superiors, *Human Dignity Strategy: About Us* (27 September 2021), retrieved at <https://emberimel-tosag.hu/hirek/about-us/>.

²¹³ See <https://www.conferenciaepiscopal.pt/v1/regulamento-compensacoes-financeiras-as-vitimas-de-abusos-sexuais/>.

²¹⁴ See <https://www.inirr.fr/>.

²¹⁵ GCPS Consulting, *Audit report on the Paris Foreign Missions Society* (November 2024), retrieved at https://missionsetrangeres.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Rapport_MEP_final_08_12_24-English.pdf.

tematic safeguarding policies, including a network of protection offices and comprehensive approaches to address and repair past abuses. In November 2023, the Spanish Bishops' Conference announced it would compensate victims/survivors of sexual abuse, even in cases where the perpetrator is deceased or there is a statute of limitations. Finally, the *Repara* initiative²¹⁶ is a project established to support victims/survivors and prevent abuse within the Archdiocese of Madrid, which has recently expanded to the Dioceses of León and Teruel. Its primary goal is to accompany and advise victims/survivors while raising awareness within the Church and broader society about the necessity of condemning and eradicating abusive practices. Over five years, *Repara* has assisted more than 400 individuals who have suffered sexual abuse, both within the Catholic Church and in familial settings, as well as abuse of power, conscience, and spirituality within ecclesiastical contexts. The project emphasises learning from the experiences of victims/survivors to better understand the complex reality of abuse and to inform appropriate responses.

- » A notable report was released in the Italian Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone as part of its project “Il coraggio di guardare” [“The courage to look”].²¹⁷ The Regional Group welcomes this commitment to the truth and transparency as an important step in the path toward reparations for victims/survivors.
- » Other examples of reparations based around restorative processes include the Jesuit Province in Ireland adopting “A Restorative Response to the Abuse of Children Perpetrated by Joseph Marmion S.J.”²¹⁸
- » Broader efforts at adopting the principles of Conversional Justice, including in Ireland, are evident. After the November 2023 publication of a paper on transitional justice,²¹⁹ the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland plans to have a national conference in 2025 on transitional justice approaches to engaging with victims/survivors.
- » There have been meaningful collaborations between the local Churches and civil authorities. France has been at the forefront of integrating civil and canon law through the implementation of memoranda of understanding between dioceses and public prosecutors.²²⁰ These memoranda of understanding ensure that cases of sexual abuse are reported to civil authorities. In Poland, the Centre for Child Protection has been operating for ten years, and recent years have focused on prevention, with the 2023 Kamilek Law mandating child protection standards in all institutions. Eleven teams have been formed to support the implementation of these standards in ecclesiastical entities, using materials based on the Kamilek Law and the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework*.
- » The Child Protection Centre at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv offers an important initiative in safeguarding children within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. It has assisted more

than 60 public organisations in developing child protection policies. A notable project involves an international collaboration with six Eastern European countries, creating an online safeguarding course for clergy, uniquely presented through the art of renowned Ukrainian icon painter Ulyana Krekhovets.

- » There have been encouraging safeguarding commitments from the Synod of Bishops in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, despite the ongoing war.²²¹
- » The Commission in Rome hosted a conference on 13–15 November 2024, “Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Europe”.²²² The Conference gathered participants from over 20 European countries, who concluded the conference by collectively signing a Declaration of Intent.²²³

• Challenges

- » Key areas for improvement in the region's safeguarding measures include enhancing evaluation mechanisms, ensuring consistent implementation of safeguarding guidelines, and fostering effective collaboration between Church and civil authorities. The Regional Group notes victims'/survivors' concerns around the actual implementation of the safeguarding guidelines in the various local Churches.
- » Recent audit reports will require swift attention to develop effective implementation plans. These include the November 2023 audit report in Spain,²²⁴ the March 2024 report in Slovakia,²²⁵ the April 2024 report in England and Wales,²²⁶ the June 2024 report in Ireland,²²⁷ and the May 2024 report in Switzerland.²²⁸
- » The Regional Group notes important calls to action directed to Church leaders from certain groups of victims. A letter in July 2024 from victims/survivors of abuse in the Polish Church sent to the Permanent Council of the episcopate reiterated their requests for concrete efforts around the issue of abuse. Their main requests included protocols around suspending the accused during ongoing investigations and the establishment of an independent commission to investigate cases of abuse since 1945. The victims/survivors asked to be heard at the next general assembly of bishops and proposed amendments to the Code of Canon Law to ensure their participation in canonical processes.

²¹⁶ Archdiocese of Madrid, *Proyecto Repara*, retrieved at <https://repara.archimadrid.es/>.

²¹⁷ Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, *Abusi sessuali di minori e persone vulnerabili, 1964–2023* (January 2025), retrieved at <https://www.bz-bx.net/it/perizia.html>.

²¹⁸ O'Connell, C., and Walshe, B., *A restorative response to the abuse of children perpetrated by Joseph Marmion SJ* (August 2023), retrieved at <https://jesuit.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RESTORATIVE-RESPONSE-TO-ABUSE-OF-CHILDREN-BY-JOSEPH-MARMION-SJ-AUGUST-2023.pdf>.

²¹⁹ The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, *Paper 12: Transitional Justice* (November 2023), retrieved at https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP_Papers/Gap%20paper%2012.pdf.

²²⁰ Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church, retrieved at <https://www.ciase.fr/>.

²²¹ See <https://cdc.ucu.edu.ua/uk/news/v-ugkc-bude-stvorene-byuro-u-spravah-zahistu-nepovnolitnih-i-vrazlivih-osib/>.

²²² See <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/european-church-calls-for-vigilance-against-safeguarding-fatigue/>. The conference particularly called for continued vigilance and collaboration in creating a safer Church environment.

²²³ Pontifical Commission for the Protection Of Minors, *Conference on safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Europe* (13–15 November 2023), *Declaration of intent*, retrieved at <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/church-in-europe-a-declaration-of-intent/>.

²²⁴ Episcopal Conference of Spain, *Informe de Auditoría Sobre los Abusos Sexuales en el Ámbito de la Iglesia Católica en España* (17 November 2023), retrieved at <https://www.paradarluz.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Informe-de-auditoria-Cremades-Calvo-Sotelo.pdf>.

²²⁵ Slovakian Episcopal Conference, retrieved at https://www.kbs.sk/pdf/KBS/KBS2024Hodnotiaci_sprava_2018_2023.pdf.

²²⁶ Durham University Centre for Catholic Study, *The Cross of the Moment* (April 2024), retrieved at https://www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research/research-centres/catholic-studies-centre-for-ccs/The-Cross-of-the-Moment_digital.pdf.

²²⁷ Mary O'Toole, SC, *Report of the Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders* (June 2024), retrieved at https://www.google.it/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://assets.gov.ie/304247/bda54ffb-a2d9-4afb-a4ee-f932926600de.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwi3wf-msquAxxVzgiHHQPBR4QFnoECBMQAQ&usg=AOvVaw2xTfE2rsNECYVRjzjp_Is0.

²²⁸ Conferenza Centrale Cattolica Romana Della Svizzera, *Rapporto intermedio sull'attuazione delle misure contro gli abusi e il relativo occultamento* (2024), retrieved at https://www.ivescovi.ch/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2024/05/SBK_RKZ_KOVOS_Aufarbeitung_Missbrauch_Medienmitteilung_Werkstattgesprach_240522_IT.pdf.

- » In May 2024, the Disciplinary Section of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith held a meeting with journalists explaining that the trial of the former Jesuit priest Marko Rupnik is a sensitive case and that the Dicastery is working through it by considering all allegations against him, along with the perspective of victims/survivors and the impact on the Church.
- » The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia has had a profound impact on children, causing significant trauma and disruption. The war has led to the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of essential resources such as food, housing, and education — and leaves many families devastated by the loss of loved ones or the absence of family members who are fighting and may return with post-traumatic stress disorder, increasing the risk of abuse. These factors collectively undermine the safety and well-being of children, causing long-lasting harm.
- » In addition to the war, other factors in Europe also affect the safety of children. Immigration is a significant issue, as families uprooted from their home countries face the challenges of adapting to new environments and cultures. This transition can be fraught with difficulties, including potential hostility or discrimination in host countries. The stress of acclimating to a new society, coupled with the trauma of displacement, can further jeopardise the safety and stability of children, making it crucial to address these challenges comprehensively. The Regional Group also notes human trafficking as an issue in Europe affecting children.
- » The Regional Group notes deep concern about the rise of online child abuse. The Commission's ongoing Study Group on Online Abuse is an important undertaking to further explore its causes as well as good practices for addressing these urgent concerns.
- » In the nations of the former Soviet Union and those formerly under its influence (former satellite states of the Soviet Union), issues include alcohol abuse, severe domestic violence, and a strong culture of silence. Peer violence is also increasing, with a study conducted last year in Poland revealing that over 60 percent of children have experienced violence from their peers. Additionally, there is the growing problem of online violence and sexual exploitation on the internet.
- » Certain practices of reparations can be meaningful for victims/survivors during the experience itself but ultimately fall short because of a lack of continuity and follow-up. For example, the "From Grief to Grace" retreat programme for victims/survivors of abuse in Slovenia is a five-day programme that has been instrumental in helping participants make progress in their healing journey. However, the programme faces challenges in providing post-retreat support, as there is no established structure for ongoing assistance.
- » LGBTQ issues are very politically charged in Central Europe, slowing meaningful and important safeguarding conversations about this vulnerable population.
- » Certain countries place a tax on financial reparations offered to victims/survivors of abuse. The Regional Group notes this as a potential source of revictimisation.

Section 3

Safeguarding Activities of the Roman Curia

This section of the Annual Report explores the safeguarding ministry of the Roman Curia. Consistent with Pope Francis's vision for the Roman Curia to be at the service of the local Churches, the Commission examines the safeguarding policies, processes, and procedures of the various dicasteries vis-à-vis their accompaniment of the local Churches. This undertaking is designed to promote an "all-of-government" approach to safeguarding across the Holy See. Findings and recommendations are organised by dicastery. This year's Annual Report reviews the Dicastery for Evangelisation — Section for the First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches.



Data sources

The methodology for this section is primarily based on data exchange agreements that are defined in the Commission's memoranda of understanding with the various dicasteries, where they exist. These memoranda of understanding are formally known as Agreements on Collaboration and Exchange of Information. They allow the Commission to collect safeguarding data directly from the dicasteries, based on their various competencies.

The Commission's leadership presents the various dicasteries with customised questionnaires, soliciting data relevant to the given dicastery's safeguarding competencies.

Responses to these questionnaires often arrive in written form but are also presented and discussed in dedicated in-person meetings between the Commission's leadership (accompanied by the Annual Report Team) and the respective dicasteries. The dicasteries are also free to submit specific material that they deem relevant to the Commission's analysis.

As part of these memoranda of understanding, the Commission also engages with the various dicasteries in ongoing and ordinary joint efforts. These activities are stipulated in the individual memoranda of understanding that are published on the Commission's website.²²⁹ The Commission includes the notes and outcomes from these ongoing collaborations as part of its data collection for this section.

²²⁹ See <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/knowledgebase/plenary-assembly-3-6-may-2023/>.

» Drafting, review, and finalisation of the text

The preparation of the text follows much the same process described in Section 1 for the country analyses. Findings from the data collection effort are consolidated by the Commission's Annual Report Team into a draft text (*Instrumentum Laboris*). This draft text is presented at the Commission's Fall Plenary Assembly of the year under review for the Commission's approval to proceed. During the subsequent synodal phase, each dicastery receives the excerpt of the text that pertains to them, along with a letter from the Commission's President inviting the dicastery to a dedicated synodal exchange. The respective dicasteries have an opportunity to verify the text's factual accuracy and provide any additional information that they deem relevant. This phase often includes the exchange of written feedback as well as a series of working sessions to closely study the text.

Upon conclusion of the synodal phase, the Annual Report Team revises the text and then presents it to the Spring Plenary Assembly of the year following the reporting year, for the Commission's approval. The content of the text then proceeds to a final series of consultations with the Commission's stakeholders in the Roman Curia. Consistent with the Conversional Justice framework, the Commission uses the Annual Report as a tool for dialogue with key partners in the Universal Church to promote the ongoing conversion toward a culture of safeguarding, as encouraged by Pope Francis.



THE DICASTERY FOR EVANGELISATION

Section for the First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches

Profile

Evangelisation "is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity",²³⁰ and represents one of the most important areas of the Church's ministry. This vital function has been entrusted to one of the most historically relevant organs of the Holy See, which is now called the Dicastery for Evangelisation.

The origins of the Dicastery for Evangelisation go back to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith or *Propaganda Fide*, as it was known, and was instituted by Pope Gregory XV with the Papal Bull *Inscrutabili divinae Providentiae* of 22 June 1622.²³¹ In 1982, it became known as the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. With the reform of the Roman Curia promulgated by Pope Francis, it assumed its present name: the Dicastery for Evangelisation.

²³⁰ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), par. 14, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

²³¹ HOLY SEE, *Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples*, par. 1, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/en/congregazioni/congregazione-per-levangellizzazione-dei-popoli/profilo.html>.

The Dicastery is responsible for fundamental questions of evangelisation and for the establishment, accompaniment, and support of newly established local Churches, without prejudice to the scope of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches.²³² The Dicastery is made up of two Sections: the Section for Fundamental Questions Regarding Evangelisation in the World and the Section for the First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches. The Dicastery for Evangelisation is directly presided over by the Roman Pontiff. Each of the two sections is governed in his name and by his authority by a Pro-Prefect.²³³

The Commission has developed close cooperation with the Section for First Evangelisation and New Particular Churches. This Section performs very important functions in supporting new local Churches in the missionary territories, including supervising their governance and safeguarding initiatives. The local Churches under its purview include approximately 1,200 ecclesiastical circumscriptions. According to the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, "This Section supports the proclamation of the Gospel and the deepening of the life of faith in territories of the first evangelisation and is responsible for all that concerns the erection or modification of ecclesiastical circumscriptions, their provision and carries out other tasks, analogous to those carried out by the Dicastery for Bishops in the area of its own competence".²³⁴

Its mandate regarding the accompaniment of new local Churches and their bishops is wide-reaching, including:

- » Promoting the training and formation of the secular clergy and catechists²³⁵
- » Directly offering the initial and ongoing formation of bishops²³⁶
- » Providing funding for the new local Churches, until a level of financial autonomy can be reached²³⁷
- » Organising, coordinating, and facilitating the *ad limina Apostolorum* visits for the bishops in the new local Churches²³⁸
- » Administering the Pontifical Mission Societies, including (of notable importance in safeguarding) the Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood.²³⁹

The Dicastery also bears certain juridical-administrative responsibilities with regard to a narrow number of cases, without prejudice to the delicts reserved for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and certain other dicasteries. These include:

- » Cases of child sexual abuse and abuses of vulnerable adults involving bishops under its jurisdiction
- » Some appeals and recourses for abuse cases involving priests
- » Cases of negligence involving bishops under its jurisdiction
- » Special faculties for laicisation, particularly since 2009.

The Commission notes the Section's distinct role in the life of new local Churches, with uniquely direct tools to assist the Church authorities under its care — especially through the Pontifical Mission Societies. The Commission emphasises the Section's distinguished place within the Roman Curia and its broad mandate for the overall vitality and development of the local Churches under its care.

²³² FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), Art. 53, §1.

²³³ Ibid., Art. 53, §2.

²³⁴ Ibid., Art. 61.

²³⁵ Ibid., Art. 63.

²³⁶ Ibid., Art. 64, §3.

²³⁷ Ibid., Art. 65.

²³⁸ Ibid., Art. 66.

²³⁹ Ibid., Art. 67, §1.

• Safeguarding overview

- » The Commission welcomes the fact that the Section has adequate human resources for case management to handle the small number of cases involving abuse or negligence that are within its remit. The Commission notes that these are administrative faculties, as the Dicastery is not a tribunal.
- » The Dicastery signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission on 21 April 2023, describing the specific scope of a collaboration on safeguarding activities.²⁴⁰ Primary areas of cooperation include the promotion of the Memorare Initiative, the vetting processes for candidates to the episcopate, initial and ongoing safeguarding formation for bishops, coordination of the *ad limina* visits, and safeguarding formation for the Section's personnel.
- » The Section has held meetings with members and personnel of the Commission to promote cooperation and the exchange of information related to their respective competencies. These meetings have helped clarify steps forward to begin implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding. The Section's experience has been invaluable in facilitating an understanding of the problems and specifics of safeguarding in the local Churches of the Global South. These meetings have also helped the Commission develop broader knowledge of the Section's safeguarding activities and the challenges faced in accompanying the new local Churches' safeguarding ministry.
- » The Commission welcomes the fact that the Section has a dedicated Official with a safeguarding-specific portfolio. This Official liaises on safeguarding activities with all the Officials assigned to specific countries. This structure allows for a specialisation of the Section's safeguarding accompaniment ministry. It also allows for a direct point of reference for the Commission's day-to-day collaborations and activities with the Section.
- » The Section also has a dedicated Official for *ad limina* coordination, including regular and frequent liaison work with the Commission. The Commission notes this as a good practice. The Section has received, processed, and shared a significant number of quinquennial reports with the Commission, allowing robust preparations for the Commission's *ad limina* visits. The Commission notes a steady, consistent, and healthy rotation of bishops coming on *ad limina* visits from the new local Churches. The Section has helped facilitate meetings between these bishops and the Commission during their visits to Rome. These bishops in turn have shown encouraging engagement with the Commission's work.
- » The Section's instructions to the Apostolic Nuncios, ahead of each *ad limina* visit, include a memo on the importance of the local Church's safeguarding ministry.
- » The Section has organised and hosted courses for newly elected bishops from the new local Churches. The Commission notes that these 15-day courses include a session on safeguarding formation. The courses are usually held annually in September. In 2024, the course was attended by 114 newly elected bishops; 110 attended in 2023 and 81 attended in 2022.

- » The Commission notes the important work of the Pontifical Mission Societies' Holy Childhood Association (the Association) and its promotion of child dignity. The Commission welcomes the Association's "*Orientamenti nell'uso delle immagini dei minori*" ("Guidelines for the Use of Images of Minors") and its important foundation in human dignity, as informed by Catholic social teaching.
- » The Association's International Secretariat hosted five online safeguarding sessions for educators and children that specifically addressed the spiritual abuse of power.
- » The Association's International Secretariat distributes a safeguarding questionnaire as part of the grant application process.
- » The Dicastery's Juridical Committee made a presentation during the 2024 General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies regarding the following directive: "Qualora pervenga in qualsiasi modo alle PP.OO.MM una *notitia criminis* riguardante un abuso sessuale su minori o un reato di abuso finanziario o qualsiasi altra fattispecie di reato spetta alle PP.OO.MM trasmettere quanto prima la segnalazione, unitamente all'eventuale relative documentazione o a quant'altro sia in loro possesso, al Dicastero per l'Evangelizzazione — Sezione per la prima evangelizzazione e le nuove Chiese particolari, il quale procederà applicando la normativa canonica vigente",²⁴¹ which obliges the Pontifical Mission Societies to transmit any report of any crime to the Section.
- » Most bishops under the Section's purview usually transmit any cases of abuse directly to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. However, when a case arrives exclusively to the Section, it is the Dicastery's policy to immediately transmit the case to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and to inform the Apostolic Nuncio in the country where the case originated. The Section leaves any communications with victims/survivors to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- » The Commission welcomes the Dicastery's stance that the Commission can accompany the bishops in a meaningful way during the *ad limina* visits vis-à-vis their safeguarding ministry. The Commission notes the Dicastery's specific mention of reparations as an important pillar of Conversional Justice for the Commission to discuss with the bishops during their *ad limina* visits.

• Challenges

- » The Section faces challenges with navigating the jurisdictions described in *Vos estis lux mundi*, which can create overlapping competencies between several dicasteries. This lack of clarity, together with the different local and central ecclesiastical authorities involved, can create confusion and delays in initiating investigations and handling complaints.

²⁴⁰ Vatican News, *Holy See: Curial departments sign new agreement on child protection* (21 April 2023), retrieved at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-04/holy-see-curial-departments-sign-new-agreement-on-child-protect.html>.

²⁴¹ Unpublished document. [Translation: If a *notitia criminis* concerning child sexual abuse or financial abuse or any other type of crime is received in any way by the Pontifical Mission Societies, it is imperative to transmit the report, together with any relevant documentation or anything else in their possession, as soon as possible to the Dicastery for Evangelisation - Section for First Evangelisation and the New Particular Churches, which will proceed by applying the canonical regulations in force.]

- » The new local Churches face ongoing challenges with regard to resources — both financial and human — available for safeguarding, especially under the new requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*. Moreover, many of the new local Churches are in countries facing conflict, severe climate conditions, or social, health, and government crises, which are all factors that hinder the development of effective safeguarding policies. The Commission notes the need for the Dicastery to further expand its economic support of the new local Churches, in terms of central funding of local safeguarding initiatives as well as partnerships that enable the creation of local resources for sustainability and autonomy in the long term.
- » The Section has only one dedicated Official for accompanying the development of safeguarding policies for prevention and protection in the new local Churches, with a very large portfolio of countries to cover.
- » The Section does not directly manage the logistical scheduling and organisation of the *ad limina* visits, as would be assumed based on the competencies described in *Praedicate Evangelium*.²⁴² The Section informed the Commission that the Prefecture of the Papal Household is the current body in the Roman Curia coordinating the logistics of all *ad limina* visits from the new local Churches. The Section also informed the Commission that the Secretary of State in the Roman Curia usually informs the specific episcopal conferences of their upcoming *ad limina* visit. The Commission is willing to cooperate to enhance the efficient and effective preparatory phase of the *ad limina* process, particularly in light of the Dicastery's invitation for the Commission to submit, in a timely manner, any specific questions that it would like forwarded in preparation of the *ad limina* visits.
- » The Commission notes a high number of *ad limina* visits from the new local Churches in 2023, leading to almost weekly visits — without much lead time. Such a high volume of bishops, with each group coming from a distinct country and without much forewarning, makes it challenging to adequately prepare and customise each visit, especially without sufficient personnel. This inevitably has an impact on the Section and the Commission's ability to jointly accompany the bishops' safeguarding ministry.
- » The Commission notes a lack of safeguarding-specific questions included in the official quinquennial questionnaire, thus losing a powerful opportunity for the Section and the Commission to collect detailed data on the safeguarding ministry in the new local Churches. Nonetheless, the Commission appreciates that the Section shares responses to the official quinquennial questionnaire, which often do include information relevant to the new local Churches' safeguarding ministry.
- » The Commission notes a lack of sufficient resources available for the vetting of candidates for episcopal nomination concerning safeguarding questions.
- » The International Secretariat of the Pontifical Mission Societies' Association of the Holy Childhood does not have a global safeguarding guideline policy. Instead, the Association currently relies on safeguarding guideline documents in place at the national level.

- » The Dicastery has addressed two cases of negligence involving bishops, under the provisions of *Vos estis lux mundi*.

Recommendations

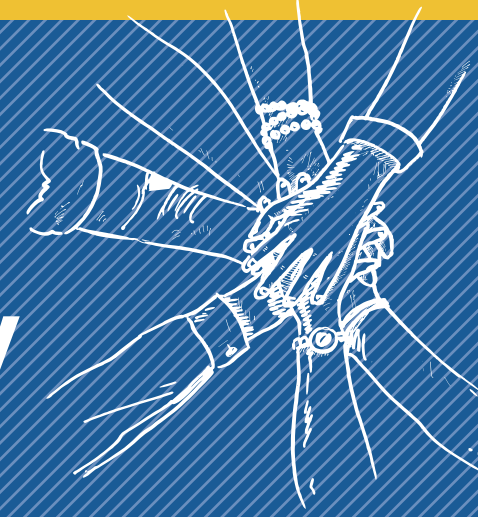
1. The Commission recommends that the Section coordinate directly with the Commission to provide initial and ongoing safeguarding formation for bishops coming periodically to Rome from the new local Churches. This safeguarding training opportunity can build on the existing formation that the Section already organises annually. The Commission also recommends a collaboration with the Section around structured follow-up to these formation courses upon the bishops' return to their respective local Churches.
2. The Commission emphasises the importance of vetting related to the protection of minors in the process of selecting candidates for the episcopate. While recognising the sensitivity of this area, the Commission stresses the importance of collecting safeguarding background information on candidates. The Commission recommends that the Section avail itself of the Commission's experts, who can help evaluate and develop the Section's internal practices regarding the vetting of candidates for episcopal nomination with regard to safeguarding questions.
3. The Commission welcomes a dialogue about how the Section might encourage the adoption of the Memorare Initiative in new local Churches, as a way of jointly working toward greater compliance with *Vos estis lux mundi* — perhaps through a collaborative funding model involving the Commission's Memorare Fund and the Section's grants through the Pontifical Mission Societies. A joint grant programme would demonstrate a particular interest in developing sustainable funding for safeguarding. Specific collaboration between the Commission's Memorare Fund and the Pontifical Mission Societies' Association of the Holy Childhood is mentioned in the Memorandum of Understanding and should be prioritised.
4. The Commission recommends the further development of a robust working relationship with the Section surrounding the *ad limina* visits, including 1) the Section's explicit endorsement of a safeguarding section in the standard quinquennial questionnaire, maintained by the Dicastery for Bishops, and 2) a collaborative review of safeguarding-related matters emerging during each *ad limina* visit, to facilitate joint follow-up (between the Section and the Commission) with the bishops after their visits.
5. The Commission recommends that the Section avail itself of the Commission's experts to train the Section's personnel as provided by the Memorandum of Understanding.

²⁴² FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), Art. 66, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.

6. The Commission recommends that the Pontifical Mission Societies' Association of the Holy Childhood publish its "*Orientamenti nell'uso delle immagini dei minori*" on its website.
7. The Commission would appreciate further insight into the trends emerging from responses to the Pontifical Mission Societies' Association of the Holy Childhood safeguarding questionnaire, as part of the grant application process.

Section 4

The Church's Safeguarding Ministry in Society



This section of the Annual Report explores how lay associations work to promote the Church's safeguarding ministry. It describes both their approach to internal safeguarding efforts to ensure safe environments for their members, and their external safeguarding efforts through their outward acts of mercy and charity²⁴³ in the broader society.

This section is not intended to represent the totality of existing lay associations, which will be addressed in more depth in future reports — but it highlights the broader dimension of their efforts, with significant examples drawn from individual entities to allow initial good practices to be shared.



Nature and significance of lay associations

The Church teaches us that the emergence of lay associations is consistent with a "...human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'" (Matt. 18:20).²⁴⁴ In other words, the spontaneous grouping of the laity is inspired by our very nature, and the Church upholds those associations as a good and a right to be cherished and supported.

The Church also teaches us that "...the associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organise and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own".²⁴⁵ At their best, the formal associations of the lay faithful promote the lay apostolate to be a collective witness in service of the Church and her mission in the world.

²⁴³ PAUL VI, Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965), par. 1, 19.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., par. 1, 18.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., par. 1, 18.

Legal basis for lay associations in canon Law

The fundamental legal basis for the laity's right to organise into associations is confirmed in Canon Law 215, which reads, "The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world and to hold meetings for the common pursuit of these purposes". The specific canonical provisions that govern these associations are found in Canons 298 through 329. There are 122 international associations of the faithful and other ecclesial realities formally recognised or established by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life²⁴⁶ — the Dicastery under whose purview they fall.²⁴⁷

The ministry of lay associations

The Church teaches us that "charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit that have, directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity, and to the needs of the world".²⁴⁸ Indeed, the Church teaches us that through our baptism, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we are then called to nurture throughout our lives. We do so individually but also in community. When those gifts coalesce in associations, we are able to use those gifts collectively toward our deeds of charity in the world to champion different causes in a variety of ways. As Saint John Paul II explained, "alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new solidarities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose..."²⁴⁹ In short, different associations materialise with orientations toward different ministries.

Lay movements and associations are called to devote themselves to some part of the Church's mission in the world. Indeed, "a 'cultural' effect can be accomplished through work done not so much by an individual alone but by an individual as 'a social being', that is, as a member of a group, of a community, of an association, or of a movement. Such work is, then, the source and stimulus leading to the transformation of the surroundings and society as well as the fruit and sign of every other transformation in this regard".²⁵⁰ Lay movements and associations clearly have an important responsibility in the life of the Church to promote a "cultural effect" — or as otherwise understood in the Christian life, a *conversion*.

Importance of safeguarding in lay associations

The conversion to which lay movements and associations are called includes the Church's conversion toward a culture of safeguarding, both internally and through her works in the world. That is, lay associations are called to uphold a robust safeguarding standard, to ensure safe environments for their members, and to promote safeguarding efforts in the broader society through their charitable works.

²⁴⁶ See <https://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/associazioni-e-movimenti/repertorio.1.html>.

²⁴⁷ FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), Art. 134, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.

²⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), par. 24, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., par. 29.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., par. 29.

The importance of the internal safeguarding efforts of these lay associations requires an examination of the accountability and transparency mechanisms built into their governance. Pope Francis has expressed particular concern with regard to this dimension of the safeguarding ministry of lay associations. As he explained, "The exercise of governance within associations and movements is a theme that is particularly close to my heart, especially considering — what I said earlier — the cases of abuse of various kinds that have occurred in these realities and that always find their root in the abuse of power. This is the origin: the abuse of power".²⁵¹

The importance of the external safeguarding efforts of these lay associations requires an examination of the successes and challenges within their ministries with respect to the broader society. Indeed, these lay associations are called to "a commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person. Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society".²⁵² A commitment to such conditions necessitates a commitment to the promotion of safeguarding throughout society.

The importance of accepting the challenge of developing prevention and management approaches that are in line with international standards, such as those adopted by the bishops' conferences and religious institutes that find a common platform in the Commission's *Universal Guidelines Framework*, cannot be overstated, and also applies to audit procedures and the ongoing training of leadership and members.

Methodology

Developing a methodology for this section of the Annual Report first requires an understanding of the organisational structure of lay movements and associations. It is a complicated question that the Church has increasingly confronted as these associations have further grown in prominence.²⁵³ In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI called the ecclesial movements to submit to the discernment of the ecclesiastical authorities, and communion with the Successor of Peter and the bishops.²⁵⁴ In 2014, Pope Francis reiterated this call when he said that "...real communion cannot exist in Movements or in New Communities unless these are integrated within the greater communion of our Holy Mother, the hierarchical

²⁵¹ FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the Meeting of Moderators of Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* (16 September 2021), par. 3, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches2021/september/documents/20210916-associazioni-fedeli.html>.

²⁵² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), par. 30, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

²⁵³ JOHN PAUL II, *Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities for the Vigil of Pentecost* (May 30 1998); "Today a new stage is unfolding before you: that of ecclesial maturity. This does not mean that all problems have been solved. Rather, it is a challenge. A road to take. The Church expects from you the 'mature' fruits of communion and commitment", par. 6, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980530_riflessioni.html.

²⁵⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the participants of the Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* (22 May 2006); "She is also grateful to you for your readiness not only to accept the active directives of the Successor of Peter, but also of the Bishops of the various local Churches who, with the Pope, are custodians of truth and charity in unity. I trust in your prompt obedience", retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/pont-messages/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20060522_ecclesial-movements.html.

Church”.²⁵⁵ A lack of integration with the hierarchical Church gives rise to challenges in identifying a clear and positive organisational structure on which to base oversight and accountability.

Prevailing Universal Law on the governance and authority of lay associations

The prevailing Universal Law provides for the right governance of these lay associations but ultimately notes, as Pope John Paul II said, “All of us, Pastors and lay faithful, have the duty to promote and nourish stronger bonds and mutual esteem, cordiality and collaboration among the various forms of lay associations”.²⁵⁶ Indeed, the “...coessentiality of charismatic and hierarchical gifts in the Church”²⁵⁷ is fundamental, and the Commission’s methodology for accompanying lay associations will not succeed without the continued nourishment of this communion.

Despite practical challenges with hierarchical communion, the normative framework has been substantially developed and improved to accompany the path forward. Prevailing Universal Law and papal magisterium on the governance, leadership, and authority of lay movements have been recently clarified.²⁵⁸ The most recent updates to norms governing lay associations are found in the “Decree of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life: ‘Associations of the Faithful’ regulating the exercise of government in international associations of the faithful, private and public, and in other bodies with legal personality subject to direct supervision by the same Dicastery”.²⁵⁹ This Decree is accompanied by an explanatory note.²⁶⁰

Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life: Governance mandate

In accordance with the *Praedicate Evangelium*, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life holds the following competency in the Roman Curia: “In enlivening and encouraging the promotion of the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world, the Dicastery cooperates with the various lay ecclesial organisations so that the lay faithful share both their experiences of faith in diverse social contexts and their own secular skills in the Church’s pastoral ministry and governance”.²⁶¹ The Apostolic Constitution then goes on to state the governance mandate that the Dicastery

has over the lay movements, specifically in “recognising or erecting, in conformity with the provisions of canon law, those which have an international character and approving their statutes, without prejudice to the competence of the Secretariat of State. It also deals with possible hierarchical appeals relating to the common life and apostolate of the laity”.²⁶² The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life is the most immediate authority with universal purview over the international lay associations.

Accompaniment mandate in the lay associations’ safeguarding ministry

The Dicastery “studies issues relating to cooperation between the laity and ordained ministers in virtue of their baptism and the diversity of charisms and ministries, in order to foster in both an awareness of co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church”.²⁶³ The Commission affirms that this cooperation and co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church necessarily includes her safeguarding ministry. Therefore, the Commission recognises that the Dicastery has a unique remit to accompany the safeguarding ministry of the international lay associations.

In considering the history of the collaboration between the Dicastery and the Commission over a sustained period, the Commission expresses appreciation for the safeguarding work already carried out by the Dicastery — especially in the context of the Dicastery’s request addressed to the lay associations to develop adequate safeguarding tools. The Commission recognises the Dicastery’s competency on these instruments but also notes the Dicastery’s willingness to promote a collaboration with the Commission regarding their review. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to help develop tools and methodologies to promote both the Dicastery’s internal expertise in the evaluation of safeguarding policies and a mapping of the information collected by the Dicastery.

Proposing a pilot methodology

It is the Commission’s hope that in outlining a robust methodology, the Annual Report might be an instrument of conversion to illuminate the path forward for greater oversight and accountability over time. In this sense, the methodology developed in this Annual Report might serve as a pilot for the Commission to roll out over time, in close collaboration with the Dicastery and the leadership of the various lay associations.

In 2024, the Dicastery requested data from all the international lay associations regarding their safeguarding policies and procedures. The Commission proposes a methodology in direct collaboration with the Dicastery to map and review these safeguarding policies and procedures. The collaboration between the Commission and the Dicastery would allow the identification of an indicative but representative set of lay associations — at different stages of development in their safeguarding structures. This research makes it possible to identify a spectrum of advancements in prevention, training, and case management work. On a practical level, the Commission has offered the *Universal Guidelines Framework* as an evaluation matrix, while also recognising that this framework is primarily aimed at local Churches. A standard questionnaire would be presented to the lay associations in order to gather

²⁵⁵ FRANCIS, *Address to the Third World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* (22 November 2014), par. 3, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141122-convegno-movimenti-ecclesiali.html.

²⁵⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), par. 31, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

²⁵⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter “Iuvenescit Ecclesia” to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church* (15 May 2016), par. 10, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html.

²⁵⁸ FRANCIS, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the meeting of moderators of lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities* (16 September 2021); “It is the very reality of the last few decades that has shown us the need for the changes that the Decree asks of us”, par. 3, retrieved at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/sep-tember/documents/20210916-associazioni-fedeli.html>.

²⁵⁹ Card. Kevin Farrell, *Decree of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life “Associations of the Faithful” regulating the exercise of government in international associations of the faithful, private and public, and in other bodies with legal personality subject to direct supervision by the same Dicastery*, retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/06/11/0375/00816.html#en>.

²⁶⁰ Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *Explanatory note* (11 June 2021), retrieved at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/06/11/0375/00817.html#notaen>.

²⁶¹ FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), Art. 129, retrieved at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html.

²⁶² Ibid., Art. 134.

²⁶³ Ibid., Art. 132.

further data on the safeguarding initiatives and structures in place. After reviewing the responses, the Commission and the Dicastery might jointly provide feedback to the international lay associations and suggest specific recommendations for improving their safeguarding regime.

As this methodology is rolled out, the Commission's Annual Report can then present those joint findings and recommendations as a meaningful commitment to transparency and accountability.

Application of the pilot methodology for this Annual Report

To test this pilot methodology, the Commission presents findings on the Focolare Movement in this Annual Report. It reviewed the Focolare Movement's safeguarding practices and procedures against the *Universal Guidelines Framework*, in direct collaboration with the Dicastery. It also proposed a standard questionnaire to the Focolare Movement's leadership as an additional data collection tool. The results from this test of the pilot methodology are presented next.



WORK OF MARY FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

Profile

The Work of Mary — Focolare Movement is a universal private association of pontifical right, from the perspective of its canonical legal personality, and is under the jurisdiction of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. The members of the Focolare Movement "engage in various forms of dialogue and are committed to building bridges of fraternal relationships among individuals, between cultural groups and in every area of society".²⁶⁴ The Focolare Movement is "governed by the General Assembly, and the *Centro dell'Opera*, comprising the President (always a focolarina, as per the Statute), co-President (a priest focolarino) and the General Council. The Movement is divided into zones (geographical areas), with their own management bodies which answer to the *Centro dell'Opera*".²⁶⁵ The Movement is also governed in part by a General Council comprising the members of the *Centro dell'Opera*, along with the leaders of the various branches. The Focolare Movement is present in 182 countries, has 25 "small towns" providing communal life for its members, and operates Mariapolis Centres in 35 countries to host retreats and ongoing formation.²⁶⁶

The Movement's branches include diocesan priests and deacons, volunteers, "gen" (young people, youth, children), "gen's" (young people with vocations to the priesthood), religious, and bishop-friends of the Movement. The Movement includes certain thematic branches as well, including: "Famiglie nuove", "Umanità nuova", "Giovani per un mondo unito", "Ragazzi per l'unità", "Movimento parrocchiale", and "Movimento diocesano".

²⁶⁴ See <https://www.focolare.org/en/about-us/#focolare>.

²⁶⁵ Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *Work of Mary - Focolare Movement: Organisation*, retrieved at <https://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/associazioni-e-movimenti/repertorio/opera-di-maria.html?q=Work+of+Mary++Focolare+Movement>.

²⁶⁶ Focolare Movement, *Dossier* (March 2024), p. 2, retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/download/117/inglese/281891/dossier_the-focolare-movement_20210215.pdf?lang=it.

Safeguarding overview

- » The Commission notes the document "Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement",²⁶⁷ approved on 21 February 2025 and entering into force on 1 March 2025. These procedures replaced the previous document of the same title that was in force on an *ad experimentum* basis from 1 May 2023 until 28 February 2025. That document in turn replaced its predecessor document, "Guidelines of the Focolare Movement for the promotion of the well-being and protection of minors and vulnerable persons", dated 21 June 2019.
- » The Commission welcomed the Movement's outreach for a review by the Commission of "Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement". The Commission notes with gratitude the subsequent series of working sessions held between the Commission and the Movement's safeguarding team.
- » The new Procedures meaningfully reflect the Commission's recommendations after the review conducted in 2024. The new Procedures also incorporate important changes in Universal Law, especially regarding reporting to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, as determined by *Vos estis lux mundi*.
- » The new Procedures provide a clear reference to collaborations with civil authorities in the various countries in which the Movement is active.
- » The new Procedures also establish structures to deal with abuse complaints, including an Independent Central Commission, several Independent National Commissions, and a Supervisory Board. The Independent Central Commission's rulings are binding and can only be appealed to the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.
- » The Commission notes the Movement's 2023²⁶⁸ and 2022²⁶⁹ "Annual Report on activities and data on cases of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, abuse of conscience, spiritual abuse and abuse of authority"; the "Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults",²⁷⁰ and "The Focolare Movement's Communication Policy concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults".²⁷¹ The Commission welcomes the publication of these documents online.

²⁶⁷ Focolare Movement, *Procedure per la gestione dei casi di abuso nel Movimento dei Focolari* (March 2025), retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=106&wpfd_file_id=282282&token=&preview=1.

²⁶⁸ Focolare Movement, *Safeguarding of the Person in the Focolare Movement* (2023), retrieved at https://eyut279xk3q.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Resoconto_MdF_2023_Tutela_Persona-ENG.pdf.

²⁶⁹ Focolare Movement, *Towards a Safeguarding Culture Encompassing the Whole Person* (2022), retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=107&wpfd_file_id=284247&token=&preview=1.

²⁷⁰ Focolare Movement, *Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults* (10 November 2023), retrieved at <https://www.focolare.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OVR-20231110-GUIDELINES-FORMATION-SAFEGUARDING-2.pdf>.

²⁷¹ Focolare Movement, *The Focolare Movement's Communication Policy concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults* (10 February 2024), retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/TEN-Focolare_Information_Policy-v-20240210.pdf.



- » The Commission notes the “Guidelines on support and financial reparation in cases of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults”,²⁷² and welcomes its publication online. The Movement reports a commission established to study and apply good practices for reparations in support of victims/survivors.
- » The Commission notes the establishment of a subcommittee to provide accompaniment to victims/survivors during the period when a case is still under investigation and review.
- » The Commission notes the Movement’s “Guidelines for a listening and welcoming service in safeguarding the human person”,²⁷³ and welcomes its publication. This document provides for the involvement of qualified experts to promote professionalised support and accompaniment services. The Commission notes that this service targets not only primary victims/survivors, but also their family members, loved ones, and the community they belong to, who are defined as “secondary victims”. This is a good practice.
- » The Commission notes the “Composition of the Independent Central Commission for handling cases of abuse within the Focolare Movement”,²⁷⁴ and welcomes its publication online.
- » The Commission notes the “Composition of the Supervisory Board”,²⁷⁵ regarding oversight of the Independent Central Commission’s implementation of the Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement. The Commission welcomes the publication of this document online.
- » The Commission notes briefings of abuse cases published on the Movement’s website, with due regard for personal data concerns.²⁷⁶
- » The Commission notes contact email addresses for reporting abuse published on the Movement’s website.²⁷⁷
- » The Commission notes the Independent Central Commission’s policy to pause its internal procedures in the case of ongoing canonical or civil proceedings. The Independent Commission resumes its own procedures only upon the conclusion of these external proceedings. The Independent Central Commission also upholds a policy to function autonomously from the findings of these external proceedings, including through the adoption of disciplinary measures that would be deemed irrelevant by canonical or civil standards.

²⁷² Focolare Movement, *Guidelines on support and financial reparation in cases of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults* (21 March 2023), retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CGO-00-20230328-MdF-Linee_di_sos-tegno_alle_vittime_e_riparazione_finanziaria-EN.pdf.

²⁷³ Focolare Movement, *Guidelines for a listening and welcoming service in safeguarding the human person* (1 March 2025), retrieved at https://www.focolare.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=106&wpfd_file_id=371680&token=&preview=.

²⁷⁴ Focolare Movement, *Composition of the Independent Central Commission for handling cases of abuse within the Focolare Movement* (2 January 2024), retrieved at <https://www.focolare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CCI-00-20240201-Commissione-Centrale-Indipendente-EN-1.pdf>.

²⁷⁵ Focolare Movement, *Composition of the Supervisory Board* (2024), retrieved at <https://www.focolare.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/UCF-00-20230306-EN-Organo-vigilanza-1.pdf>.

²⁷⁶ See <https://www.focolare.org/en/cases-of-abuse/>.

²⁷⁷ See <https://www.focolare.org/en/safe-spaces-2/>.

- » The Commission notes an independent report commissioned in December 2020 by then-Focolare President Maria Voce to investigate the offenses committed by a former consecrated member of the Focolare in France.²⁷⁸
- » The Commission notes the publication in March 2022 of the independent report entrusted to GCPS Consulting.²⁷⁹

• Challenges

- » The structures created by “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement” are not yet included in the General Statutes of the Focolare Movement, since those statutes date back to 2008 and therefore predate the Procedures.
- » The Procedures only provide measures to be implemented in the event of an abuse complaint. This document does not provide a code of conduct, provisions for accompanying victims/survivors, training and education, or other prevention measures. The Commission welcomes the Movement’s commitment to better integrating these additional considerations into a consolidated document titled “Policy for safeguarding the human person in the Focolare Movement”, to be published in 2025.
- » The new Procedures clarify provisions for transmitting denunciations based on the various possible clerical states of the alleged perpetrator (cleric, religious, or lay — according to Canon 1398 §2). However, the Commission notes that the current wording of the new Procedures only provide for “an invitation” to transmit a denunciation to the relevant local ordinary or major superior.
- » The Procedures state that members of the Independent Central Commission are only appointed by the President and may only be dismissed directly and with serious cause by the President of the Movement. Moreover, no protections are indicated for members of the Independent National Commissions. This may compromise the actual independence of the Independent Commissions.
- » There are no provisions for an external audit procedure, nor any systemic plan for independent review. The Commission notes that the Supervisory Board is not an external auditor, despite being a valuable provision in the Movement’s safeguarding apparatus.
- » The new Procedures do not require victims/survivors to be proactively and affirmatively informed of their right to report their case to the civil authorities.

²⁷⁸ Maria Voce, *An invitation to be reborn: How a crisis caused by abuse in Focolare is an opportunity for renewal* (31 May 2022), retrieved at https://www.focolaremedia.com/magazine/content/invitation-be-reborn?srltid=AfmBOoqog24ygKBSLNxbp_uHGjmnt80EvDQVCYt-AQO7Z7-xbOfR8Pkb.

²⁷⁹ GCPS Consulting, *Report of an independent inquiry into historical child abuse* (2022), retrieved at <https://inquiry.gcps.consulting/doc/JMM-Inquiry-Report-En.pdf>.

- » The Commission stresses the importance of remembering the serious and substantial imbalance, in many cases, of the positions in which the victim/survivor and the accused find themselves. While still respecting the presumption of innocence and the right to defense, it should be noted that the new Procedures continue to pay more attention to the rights of the accused persons as compared to the rights of victims/survivors, especially in reference to the right to information regarding ongoing proceedings: the Procedures provide for a right to information for the accused but no analogous means to achieve the same for the victim/survivor.
- » There is a lack of clarity regarding the permanence of the listening and welcoming service established by “Guidelines for a listening and welcoming service in safeguarding the human person”. The Guidelines do not specify whether this service is stable and permanent or whether it is only activated upon request.
- » The Commission notes the limited guarantees of professional services provided in “Guidelines for a listening and welcoming service in safeguarding the human person”. The Commission stresses that the service should be open to all and ensure immediate assistance to victims/survivors, regardless of conditions stipulated in other documents.
- » The Commission notes the lack of clarity in the new Procedures surrounding the correct statutes of limitations for different offenses.
- » The Commission notes that the domain of the Supervisory Board’s email addresses is not under the direct administration of the Movement, jeopardising the ability to maintain appropriate guarantees of confidentiality and data management consistent with the Movement’s responsibilities.
- » The Commission notes a lack of clarity around the amount of explicitly dedicated resources to support the various components of the Movement’s safeguarding apparatus.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends the following:

1. Harmonising the Movement’s various and disaggregated policies into a unified and coherent document. The Commission welcomes the Movement’s commitment to the publication of such a consolidated document, with due reference to the respective guideline documents and procedures, to be titled “Policy for safeguarding the human person in the Focolare Movement”, which the Movement reports will be published in 2025.
2. Publishing the “Rules of Procedure for the Independent Commission”, referenced in the new “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement”, which would demonstrate an important commitment to transparency. The Commission welcomes the Movement’s commitment to publish the Rules of Procedure for the Independent Central Commission and the Supervisory Board by 31 May 2025.

3. Formally integrating the structures created by “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement”, especially the Independent Commissions, into the Movement’s General Statutes. The Commission welcomes the Movement’s openness to present a proposal for this integration to the General Assembly.
4. Developing a protocol for the dismissal of Members of the Independent Commissions (central and national), to better ensure their actual independence. The Commission recommends the publication of this protocol.
5. Developing a collegial appointment process to the Independent Central Commission. Such a process should include a check and balance on the appointment power that is currently vested exclusively in the Presidency.
6. Integrating the relevant canonical and international juridical definitions into its Procedures for all relevant offenses. The Commission welcomed the Movement’s initial review of its Procedures to ensure that definitions are better aligned with recent changes in Universal Law, and remains available to continue accompanying this initiative by offering its expertise and specific proposals, especially through insights provided by the Commission’s Study Group on Vulnerability.
7. Amending the new “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement” to explicitly require reporting to the local ordinary or major superior, rather than just “inviting” such reporting.
8. Adopting a case management procedure specific to lay members of the Movement, especially those who do not fall under Canon 1398 §2. This procedure could be developed using a human resources approach, modeled after Caritas Internationalis, for lay members, paired with one that is explicitly divided by the state of life (clerical state) and the condition of the office held in the Movement. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
9. Developing and committing to an external audit, despite the merits of the Supervisory Board. The Commission remains available to accompany this initiative.
10. Amending “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement” to better balance references to the rights of the accused persons with those of victims/survivors. This balance is especially important for a victim’s/survivor’s ongoing need to access information regarding their case.
11. Adjusting the “Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement” to include, in the case of a denunciation, a specific provision that victims/survivors be proactively and affirmatively informed of their right to report their case to the civil authorities.
12. Adopting an institutional email domain for the Supervisory Board’s contacts, primarily for confidentiality and the protection of sensitive data that may circulate through these accounts. The Commission welcomes the Movement’s commitment to this by 31 May 2025.

13. Publishing the scope, membership, and statutes of the Movement's commission for studying and applying good practices for reparations to victims/survivors.
14. Amending "Guidelines for a listening and welcoming service in safeguarding the human person" to ensure the permanence of the listening and welcoming service, consistent with the requirements of *Vos estis lux mundi*.
15. Conducting a thorough assessment of the financial resources necessary to implement the various components of the Movement's full safeguarding apparatus. The Commission recommends that the Movement subsequently dedicate a stable and guaranteed budget, corresponding to those assessed needs, and publish this dedicated safeguarding budget as a concrete commitment to the effective implementation of the structures established in the various safeguarding documents.



**TUTELA
MINORUM**
PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR THE
PROTECTION OF MINORS

Appendix

Financial Report

The Commission has been financed since its establishment with funds from the Holy See. The independence necessary for the Commission's mandate, established in the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, is reflected in the economic independence accorded by the Holy See, which gives the Commission a dedicated annual budget.

The main part of the Commission's budget is financed directly by the Apostolic See within the Holy See's consolidated budget. During each fiscal year (which runs from January 1 to December 31), the Commission must prepare the budget for the following year, identifying strategic projects and their necessary financial support. In addition to providing periodic reports of expenditures, the Commission reports after December 31 of each year on the annual expenses incurred. These reports are addressed to the oversight, approval, and supervisory bodies established by the Holy See: the Secretariat for the Economy, the Council for the Economy, and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See.

In 2024, the total expenditures of the Commission amounted to €547,312, of which €236,680 was spent for personnel and the remainder for operational expenses such as travel, events, research activities, technological materials, and facilities upkeep. The last few years have been continually marked by serious budgetary difficulties for the Holy See, which — while not resulting in reductions to the support given to the Commission — have prevented a substantial increase in the amount of the Commission's budget borne by the Apostolic See. Given Pope Francis's expansion of the Commission's mandate with regard to developing guidelines, capacity building, and the Annual Report, alternative pathways for support have been sought.

The Commission is especially grateful to the GHR Foundation, based in Minnesota (U.S.), which has generously agreed to support the Commission for a three-year period (2023–2025). GHR's goal is to support the reform efforts begun by Pope Francis in the Roman Curia. GHR has a programme that provides the Commission with safeguarding experts, living across the local regions, to promote the Commission's agenda. These staff, not dependent on the Commission or the Holy See, are remunerated directly by the GHR Foundation. In addition to administering these consulting contracts, GHR directly provided the Commission with €71,612 to equip its primary meeting room with internet technology that allows for video conferencing and remote participation.



In 2024, the Commission received continued contributions from the Italian Episcopal Conference totalling €500,000. Similarly, the Commission received continued contributions from the Papal Foundation, totalling €185,658. The Commission also has a new multiyear commitment from the Conrad Hilton Foundation to support capacity building, with a specific focus on religious life. For 2024, the Commission received contributions from the Conrad Hilton Foundation totalling €238,731. The Commission also received a contribution totalling €15,000 from Porticus Stichting Benevolentia to support capacity building in the European region, through the Commission's November 2024 European conference.

Finally, the Spanish Episcopal Conference has earmarked funds that it disperses directly to Memorare Initiatives around the world, according to the recommendation of the Commission. Similarly, Aid for the Church in Need has earmarked funds that it disperses directly to Memorare Initiatives around the world, according to the recommendation of the Commission and a joint financing arrangement.

The Commission is grateful for this solidarity directed toward its mission, particularly in service of the local Churches in the Global South. This support concretely demonstrates unity and communion in the Church's safeguarding ministry.

The Memorare Initiative

The Commission realises that it is difficult for ecclesial entities that are financially and structurally constrained to adopt and implement uniformly high safeguarding standards. To support compliance with the institutional safeguarding requirements in *Vos estis lux mundi*, the Commission established the Memorare Initiative. Since 2022, the Commission has been collecting earmarked funds from episcopal conferences, religious orders, and philanthropic foundations that wish to assist the less-resourced Churches of the Global South. These funds support the Memorare Fund. In 2024, the Commission dispersed €425,390 from the Memorare Fund.

The name for the Memorare Initiative comes from the traditional prayer to the Blessed Mother, whom we petition as a community of believers to ask that no one who is suffering is left unaided:

MEMORARE

**Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thy intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence,
I fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins, my mother.
To thee do I come, before thee I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy,
hear and answer me.

Amen.**

Conceptually, the Memorare Initiative consists of a hub of services offered by the local Church and consisting of three main pillars. The first pillar works toward ensuring that the local Church's reporting system is "easily accessible to the public", as required by *Vos estis lux mundi*, Art. 2. This pillar also works to ensure robust accompaniment services for all those affected by the scourge of abuse and allegations of abuse. The second pillar aims to build capacity around the local Church's prevention strategies, primarily through the implementation of its safeguarding guidelines and the formation opportunities that it offers.

The third pillar works to build a network of safeguarding professionals within the Church, locally and regionally, to facilitate, measure, and report on the implementation of professional safeguarding standards and accompaniment services. The creation of this network is essential to ensuring a long-term culture of safeguarding at the local level.

The Memorare Initiative is owned and operated by the local Church through a joint partnership, where possible, between the local episcopal conference and the conference of religious superiors. This en-

courages the One Church approach that the Commission promotes for an effective safeguarding strategy. The Commission financially supports these partnerships for local Churches that have a demonstrated need. The Commission serves as a conduit of funds between episcopal conferences, religious orders, and philanthropic foundations who wish to share solidarity with the safeguarding ministry of local Churches in the Global South. As such, it performs the job of reviewing partnership agreements, grant applications, and candidates for leadership of the local Memorare Initiatives.

The Commission currently has 20 agreements to support local Memorare Initiatives around the world, with another dozen under negotiation. So far, agreements have been signed in:

RWANDA

**ASSOCIATION OF MEMBER
EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES IN
EASTERN AFRICA (AMECEA)**

**ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
MOMBASA, KENYA**

MALAWI

PARAGUAY

PANAMA

COSTA RICA

VENEZUELA

**ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
CHUBUT, ARGENTINA**

URUGUAY

**ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
SAN LUIS POTOSÍ, MEXICO**

**ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
PARANÁ, ARGENTINA**

**ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE OF
SANTA FE, ARGENTINA**

**ARCHDIOCESE OF MEXICO
CITY, MEXICO**

HONDURAS

HAITI

TONGA

CENTRAL AFRICA REPUBLIC

**INTER-REGIONAL MEETING OF
THE BISHOPS OF SOUTHERN
AFRICA (IMBISA)**

ZIMBABWE

Built into the Memorare Initiatives' agreements is a regular reporting exercise to the Commission that provides important data from the local Churches about their outreach to victims/survivors and an account of their safeguarding activities. This data will be increasingly included in the Commission's Annual Report as an important component of its methodology in order to promote accountability and transparency.



**TUTELA
MINORUM**

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LA PROTECTION DES MINEURS

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