



**SAFEGUARDING
COMMISSION**
GOZO

Annual Report 2025

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FOREWORD

Safeguarding remains at the heart of the Church's mission and responsibility. The Safeguarding Commission in Gozo continues to promote a culture in which every person, particularly minors and vulnerable individuals, is treated with dignity, respect, and care. Through prevention, education, support, and accountability, the Commission strives to ensure that the Church remains a safe environment for all.

Throughout the year, significant efforts were dedicated to strengthening safeguarding practices across the Diocese of Gozo. The continued implementation of the Safeguarding Policy remained a key priority, supported by ongoing collaboration with the Bishop of Gozo, Church authorities, safeguarding officers, and community leaders. Regular meetings and consultations helped ensure consistency in procedures, promote shared understanding, and reinforce a collective commitment to safeguarding responsibilities at every level of Church life.

The Commission continued to invest in awareness-raising, training, and support, recognising that effective safeguarding depends on the active participation of all those involved in pastoral, educational, and community settings. Particular emphasis was placed on supporting Designated Safeguarding Officers, promoting compliance with safeguarding requirements, and encouraging the adoption of updated safeguarding tools and procedures. During the year, new consent forms were introduced to provide greater clarity, consistency, and protection in activities involving minors, representing another important step in strengthening safeguarding measures across Church entities.

The work of the Commission extends beyond responding to concerns and allegations. It includes the provision of support and advocacy for those affected, the assessment and management of risk, and the promotion of preventive measures that help safeguard communities from harm. In carrying out these responsibilities, the Commission remains committed to ensuring that all individuals involved in safeguarding processes are treated with fairness, sensitivity, confidentiality, and respect.

During the year, the Commission responded to five general enquiries, received two new referrals, and concluded three safeguarding cases. While modest in number, these figures reflect the Commission's ongoing commitment to addressing concerns diligently and professionally, while also demonstrating the confidence that individuals and communities continue to place in its work and processes.

While important progress continues to be made, safeguarding is an ongoing journey that requires vigilance, collaboration, and a shared sense of responsibility. The Commission remains grateful to all those who have contributed to this mission and reaffirms its commitment to working alongside Church entities and the wider

community to ensure that safeguarding remains an integral part of the life and ministry of the Church in Gozo.

Ultimately, safeguarding is not merely a policy or a set of procedures; it is a commitment to creating environments where every individual can feel safe, valued, heard, and protected. This annual report reflects the Commission's continued efforts towards that goal and the collective responsibility we all share in making it a reality.

Ms Loraine Borg
Head of Safeguarding

THE SAFEGUARDING ADVISORY BOARD

In 2025, the Safeguarding Advisory Board remained unchanged in its composition. The Board is made up of professionals from a range of disciplines, ensuring the availability of diverse expertise, skills, and experience necessary to provide informed advice on matters relating to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults.

The multidisciplinary nature of the Board contributes to balanced and objective discussions, enabling members to formulate well-considered recommendations that are fair, impartial, and appropriate. With expertise spanning the medical field, including psychiatry and paediatrics, as well as education and therapeutic practice, the Board benefits from a broad and complementary knowledge base.

The Safeguarding Advisory Board reviews reports arising from preliminary investigations and risk assessments presented by the Head of Safeguarding and provides recommendations and conclusions for submission to the Bishop. Throughout 2025, the Board met regularly to fulfil its advisory role and support the Diocese's safeguarding responsibilities.

The Safeguarding Advisory Board in 2025 was composed as follows:

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

THE SAFEGUARDING OFFICE

The Safeguarding Office is led by the Head of Safeguarding and comprises three dedicated safeguarding sections responsible for investigations and assessments, victim care and advocacy, and prevention and training. In carrying out its work, the Commission is also committed to safeguarding the wellbeing and rights of the subject of complaint, ensuring that all processes are conducted fairly, respectfully, and in accordance with established procedures.

All safeguarding officers possess qualifications and professional experience in the psychosocial field. Given the sensitive nature of their work, they are bound by strict confidentiality requirements to protect the privacy, dignity, and best interests of all individuals involved.

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

VARIOUS MEETINGS

The Head of the Safeguarding Commission held a number of meetings with the Bishop of Gozo throughout the year to further strengthen and support the implementation of the safeguarding policy across the Diocese. These meetings provided an opportunity to review ongoing developments, discuss emerging safeguarding needs, and reinforce the Diocese's commitment to promoting safe environments for all, particularly minors and vulnerable adults. Regular communication and collaboration at this level remain essential in ensuring that safeguarding continues to be embedded within the life and mission of the Church.

Meetings were also held with the Head of the Safeguarding Commission in Malta to ensure consistency and alignment in safeguarding procedures across the dioceses. These discussions focused on the sharing of good practices, emerging safeguarding developments, and any policy updates required to maintain effective safeguarding standards. Such collaboration contributes to a unified and informed safeguarding approach, ensuring that Church entities remain responsive to evolving needs and expectations in the protection of children and vulnerable persons.

In addition, the Head of the Safeguarding Commission met with the Kulleġġ tal-Kappillani to reaffirm the role and function of the Commission and to facilitate open dialogue on safeguarding matters. Particular emphasis was placed on the collective responsibility of all Church leaders to promote and sustain safe environments in which minors and vulnerable adults can participate, grow, and engage with confidence. The meeting explored practical ways of fostering a strong safeguarding culture within parish communities, highlighting the importance of vigilance, accountability, and respectful relationships. It also provided a valuable opportunity for participants to raise questions, seek clarification, and share experiences related to safeguarding implementation within their respective pastoral settings.

Further engagement took place through a dedicated meeting with the Designated Safeguarding Officers from various Church entities. The meeting reinforced the principle that safeguarding is a shared responsibility requiring the active participation and commitment of all those involved in Church activities and ministries. Particular attention was given to the importance of preventative safeguarding measures, ensuring that appropriate procedures are consistently applied and reviewed.

Designated Safeguarding Officers were reminded of the need to maintain up-to-date records of all adults who have regular contact with minors as part of their role or ministry, ensuring continued compliance with POMA certification requirements. This process remains an important safeguard in promoting safer environments and reducing risks for children and vulnerable persons participating in Church activities. Officers were also informed about the newly introduced consent forms and encouraged to support parishes and communities in their implementation. The forms were presented as an important safeguarding tool that strengthens communication with parents and guardians, promotes informed consent, and supports responsible planning and supervision of activities involving minors.

These meetings formed part of the Commission's broader efforts to ensure that safeguarding remains a visible and integral aspect of diocesan life. Through ongoing dialogue, collaboration, training, and support, the Commission continues to work towards fostering a culture in which the dignity, wellbeing, and protection of minors and vulnerable adults are recognised as a shared and fundamental responsibility across all Church structures and ministries.

PREVENTION AND TRAINING

Prevention and training continue to be fundamental to effective safeguarding, ensuring that those working with and supporting children are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness needed to recognise risks, respond appropriately to concerns and promote safe environments. Throughout the year, a number of initiatives were organised to strengthen preventive safeguarding practices and support parents, professionals and those working with minors.

As part of these efforts, a Safeguarding Course was delivered, with a total of 11 participants. In addition, five Parenting Skills sessions were held, reaching a total of 53 participants. These sessions provided an important opportunity to strengthen parents' understanding and practical skills, while promoting positive relationships, resilience and the wellbeing of children.

Preventive measures also included the processing of eight POMA applications, covering a total of 551 individuals. This work forms an important part of safeguarding procedures, helping to ensure that appropriate checks are carried out for individuals who may come into contact with minors.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Safeguarding of Minors for its continued commitment to organising, coordinating and overseeing these prevention and training initiatives. Their ongoing work plays a vital role in promoting a culture of prevention, awareness and shared responsibility, and in ensuring that safeguarding remains a priority across the community.

LAUNCH OF NEW CONSENT FORMS

Following extensive work, consultation, and review, the Safeguarding Commission successfully developed and launched four distinct consent forms for use by parishes and communities falling within its remit. This process included examining consent forms currently used within Church and educational settings, both locally and internationally, to identify good practice and ensure that the forms meet safeguarding requirements while remaining practical for those using them.

The introduction of these forms is part of the Commission's ongoing commitment to preventative safeguarding measures and to promoting a culture of accountability, transparency, and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of minors. The forms reinforce the importance of informed parental consent and highlight the responsibilities entrusted to adults who accompany, supervise, or provide formation to children and young people in Church settings.

The four forms introduced are: Application for Catechism Formation for Sacraments, Application for Catechism Formation for Adolescents, Activity Consent Form, and Travelling Consent Form. The first two forms relate to participation in catechetical programmes and are to be completed and renewed annually. The Activity Consent

Form is required for activities taking place outside the normal premises where formation sessions are held, while the Travelling Consent Form applies to activities involving travel abroad. Both of these forms are to be completed for each individual activity or event.

Beyond serving as an administrative requirement, these consent forms provide an important safeguarding mechanism by ensuring that relevant information is collected, risks are appropriately considered, and parents or guardians are adequately informed about the activities in which their children participate. In this way, they contribute to creating safer environments for minors and support adults in fulfilling their safeguarding responsibilities effectively.

Collaboration with the Kummissjoni Djoċesana Żgħażaġh (KDŻG) made it possible to develop an online platform through which parents can securely access, complete, and submit the required forms. The platform also assists leaders and organisers by providing a centralised system for the secure storage, management, and updating of consent records according to the activity being organised. This digital solution has facilitated the implementation of the consent process for those parishes and communities choosing to adopt it, while ensuring compliance with GDPR requirements and promoting greater efficiency and accessibility for all stakeholders involved.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES ADDRESSED IN 2025

The Safeguarding Commission handled 5 enquiries relating to safeguarding matters in 2025. These related to enquiries on the procedures adopted by the Church that deal with safeguarding concerns, church entities related enquiries, external entities related enquiries and enquires relating to past cases.

General Enquiries in 2025	
Church entities related enquiries	2
External entities related enquiries	1
Past cases related enquiries	2
Total General Enquiries	5

REFERRALS RECEIVED IN 2025

In 2025, the Safeguarding Commission received 1 referral which warranted a risk assessment relating to a layperson.

Referrals Received in 2025			
Risk Assessment	1	Laypersons	1
Total Referrals Received	1		

COMPLAINTS CONCLUDED IN 2025

In 2025, the Safeguarding Commission concluded 3 cases concerning 1 risk assessment with 1 lay person. Another case which was ongoing from the previous year involving a historical case of 1 minor as an alleged victim and 1 lay person as an alleged perpetrator. Another case which was originally referred in 2022 and for which the Safeguarding Commission was still waiting on Civil Authorities. The latter involved 1 minor as an alleged victim and 1 lay person as an alleged subject of complaint.

The case requiring a risk assessment regarding a lay person was found to be substantiated and the necessary recommendations were put forward. The other case was also found to be substantiated, despite the court proceedings halting due to the minor's family refusing to witness and give evidence. Recommendations for restrictions were issued.

The historical case was found to be unsubstantiated since there was not enough information and evidence. Further information was requested but the alleged victim declined to provide it. The commission encouraged the alleged victim to reach out again if more information and evidence is available.

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

SUBSTANTIATED CASE IN 2025

Substantiated Cases	1 Minor	1 Risk Assessment
Role of Subject of Complaint	Lay person	Lay person
Allegation	Sexual Abuse	Risk of grooming and sexual abuse
Recommended a Restriction	Yes	Yes
Civil Authorities were Involved	Yes but case was closed due to minor's family refusing to give evidence	No
Reason for No Referral to Civil Authorities		N/A

CONCLUSION OF INVOLVEMENT IN 2025

General Enquiries	5
Substantiated	2
Unsubstantiated	0
Unfounded	0
Complainant did not give enough details for the Safeguarding Commission to be able to proceed further with the report	1
Ongoing cases	0
Total:	8

GLOSSARY

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

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

	or elitism, coercion to conform, control through the use of sacred texts or teachings, isolation as a means of punishment, or the requirement of obedience to or by that Church personnel, suggesting that the Church personnel has some kind of 'divine' authority.
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Conclusion of a Complaint

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

Other Definitions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Description</i>
Church Personnel	Any member or members of the clergy (bishops, priests, deacons), of consecrated life or of an equivalent status, of societies of apostolic life, of the faithful who enjoy a dignity or perform an office or function within the Church, including lay people duly appointed or commissioned to work in the areas of administration, pastoral ministry and care, employees and volunteers engaged in all the various activities within Church entities, staff members engaged with a Church entity through another entity, or seminarians and Religious students in formation.
Historical Cases	Cases that involve allegations which took place more than 10 years ago.
Minor	Any person under the age of 18. Equivalent to a minor is any person who has the developmental age of a child or habitually lacks the use of reason.
Pastoral Activity	Any activity that involves the Catholic Church or its mission.
Protection of Minors Act (POMA) Court Application	A request from the Voluntary Jurisdiction Section of the Civil Court (First Hall) for information which may be registered in the Register in respect of any applicant, or person who is employed, or holds any position with the same institution, establishment or organisation whether such employment or position is against payment or otherwise. This is regulated by the Protection of Minors (Registration) Act of the Laws of Malta Chapter 518.
Restriction from Pastoral Ministry	A temporary or permanent recommendation to suspend personnel from some or all pastoral activity.
Safeguarding Training	Training to raise awareness of the responsibility of Church personnel to identify signs of abuse and report concerns. The training also gives tools to personnel to create a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults.
Subject of Complaint	A person against whom a safeguarding concern has been raised.
Suspension	A permanent recommendation to suspend personnel from all pastoral

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