

NBSCCCI Newsletter

Latest News from the National Office for Safeguarding Children
in the Catholic Church in Ireland

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Summer 2026

National Office Staff

Click on any of the links
below to send an email
directly to any member of
staff

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Introduction

Dear Colleagues, Welcome to our summer edition of the NBSCCCI newsletter. As we enter this time of year we here in the National Board office have been inspired by the values expressed in Humanitas Dignitas, Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical on the inherent dignity of every person. This document reminds us all that safeguarding is not simply a policy obligation, but a profound expression of our shared humanity and Gospel mission.



Pope Leo XIV's encyclical released in May 2026,
Magnifica Humanitas

On the 10th of June, the NBSCCCI released its 2025 Annual Report. This report reflects nine months of activity (April through December 2025) as we transition our reporting cycle to align with the calendar year. While this change in timeline is significant from a governance perspective, what remains constant is the profound human reality behind the data we present. We are reminded that behind every statistic is a person—an individual whose dignity, safety, and voice must remain at the very centre of our work. The numbers we publish are not abstract measures of performance; they represent lived experiences, often marked by vulnerability, courage, and the need for compassion and justice. They speak to moments where safeguarding has either upheld or failed the trust placed in the Church, and they challenge us to continually strengthen our response.

As all of us involved in safeguarding know, we carry both the responsibility of oversight and the moral imperative to ensure that systems are not only effective, but truly person-centred. This requires more than compliance; it demands a culture of listening, transparency, accountability, and continuous learning. It calls on us to hear the voices of those who have been harmed, to acknowledge their experiences with humility, and to act decisively to prevent future harm.

This year's Annual Report highlights areas of progress, but also areas where further work is needed. It is a reminder that safeguarding is not static; it evolves as we better understand risk, power, and the dynamics of harm. All of us must remain vigilant and committed, ensuring that every procedure, every review, and every action is rooted in respect for human dignity. Ultimately, our work is about children. It is about creating environments where they feel safe, are treated with respect, and are empowered to speak up. As we reflect on this report, we do so with a renewed commitment to those we serve—to listen better, to act more effectively, and to ensure that safeguarding is not just a framework, but a lived reality for all. In this newsletter, we share updates on safeguarding from across the country, both north and south

Aida Sola

Irish Internet Hotline Annual Report 2025 – Reflection from Aidan Gordon (CEO, NBSCCCI)

Attending the launch of the Irish Internet Hotline Annual Report 2025 provided a sobering but important insight into the realities of safeguarding in today's digital world; this is something that the NBSCCCI has been focused on over recent months. The scale of harmful activity online is striking; over 61,000 reports were processed in the past year, the highest number recorded to date. This reflects the growing prevalence of harmful online content, but also the increasing public willingness to report concerns, which essentially plays a key role in safeguarding children and young people.

What is particularly concerning is the prevalence of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and the evolving nature of this. The annual report highlights a significant rise in what is termed “self-generated” material—content involving children that is often created under pressure, coercion, or manipulation. Alongside this, there is a growing use of closed platforms, forums, and restricted online spaces, which makes detection and removal more complex and underscores how quickly offending behaviour is adapting to new technologies.

hotline.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Hotline-ie-Annual-Report-2025.pdf

From a safeguarding perspective, the most powerful message in the report is the reminder that behind every report is a victim. The harm caused does not end with the initial abuse; it is prolonged each time images are shared or viewed online. This reality reinforces the importance of vigilance, timely reporting, and effective intervention in protecting children and, indeed, vulnerable people.

There are, however, important signs of progress. The Irish Internet Hotline continues to achieve high removal rates, working collaboratively with industry, law enforcement, and international partners to ensure harmful content is taken down swiftly. This demonstrates what can be achieved when systems of accountability, cooperation, and expertise are in place. [Children's Rights Alliance | Advocating for Every Child's Well-being](#)

A key takeaway for me is the importance of collaboration across the island of Ireland. Online harm does not recognise jurisdictions, and effective safeguarding requires strong cooperation between agencies in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, supported by international networks such as INHOPE. This all-island approach is essential in ensuring that reports are acted upon consistently and that children are protected regardless of where they live.

The findings of the 2025 report reinforce that safeguarding in the digital age is a shared responsibility—locally, nationally, and across borders. As a Church, we must continue to strengthen our awareness, training, and policies to respond to these evolving risks. Above all, we are called to remain focused on the dignity and protection of the child, ensuring that our safeguarding practices reflect the realities of both the physical and online worlds. To read more about the excellent work of Irish Internet Hotline click this link and build your awareness further [Hotline](#)

Understanding Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion (FMSE)

Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion (FMSE), often called “sextortion,” is a growing online threat where offenders trick or manipulate individuals—often young people—into sharing nude or semi-nude images, then threaten to release them unless money or other demands are met. Victims can be anyone, but teenage boys aged 14–17 are among the most targeted groups.

Offenders typically approach victims through fake social media accounts, quickly move conversations to a sexual nature, and use pressure or deception to obtain images. In some cases, images may even be digitally altered or AI-generated. It is important to emphasise that victims are never to blame.

Parents and carers play a key role in prevention by maintaining open, non-judgemental conversations about online activity, encouraging safe use of privacy settings, and helping young people recognise warning signs.

If a young person is targeted, the key steps are:

Do not pay the offender

Stop contact and block them

Keep evidence such as messages

Report the incident to police or appropriate services

Support is available, and quick action can help reduce harm and prevent further exploitation.

Below are some useful links that will help build our knowledge on this issue so that we can remain alert and ready to support where we can

Useful Links for Readers

CEOP Safety Centre (report online blackmail):

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/>

Childline Report Remove:

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/report-remove/>

Take It Down tool:

<https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/>

Online Safety Hub:

<https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/>

National Crime Agency FMSE advice:

<https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/kidnap-and-extortion/sextortion>

Online Safety Mini Webinars for Parents and Carers

The Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland (SBNI) have commissioned this a series of short online safety mini-webinars, which are now available via the Online Safety Hub, designed to support parents and carers. These resources are also valuable for staff and volunteers working with children and young people such as ourselves, within the Church.

The webinars were developed by online safety experts at **Childnet**. You can find out more information about Childnet here <https://www.childnet.com/>. The webinars have been shaped by feedback from partners through the Online Safety Committee, align with the Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy, and reflect the real experiences and concerns of families locally. The series includes six engaging webinars, each lasting 15–20 minutes, and provides practical advice, conversation starters, and signposting to further support. Topics covered include:

- Privacy settings and parental controls
- Group chats and peer pressure
- Online bullying behaviour and sexual harassment
- Nude image sharing
- Online pornography and misogyny
- Grooming, catfishing, and sextortion

We encourage all partners to watch, share and make use of these resources across teams, networks and settings—including schools, clubs, and family groups.

Ready-to-use content is also available to help promote the webinars through newsletters, intranets, websites and social media.

To view the webinars, please click here

<https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/>

Congratulations to the Childnet team and everyone who contributed to developing this important resource.

Get to Know NBSCCCI Accredited Trainers

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) maintains a network of trained safeguarding personnel who deliver standardised training across dioceses and religious congregations. Trainers are typically drawn from safeguarding offices, designated personnel, or individuals formally accredited through the NBSCCCI's Train-the-Trainer programme. This structure ensures consistency in safeguarding messaging, alignment with national standards, and a shared understanding of best practice across all Church bodies. And while training is consistent, each of those wonderful safeguarding personnel or volunteers is unique. In this section of the newsletter, we want to introduce you to some of those valuable people. In this edition, we continue bringing you some information about our great trainers across the country. If you would like to be featured here, please email lyn.mcdermott@safeguarding.ie

My name is Briège O'Neill and my role within the Derry Diocese is Safeguarding Co-ordinator. This is a part-time role, and I work alongside others in the Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

One of my many Derry Diocesan roles is that of Trainer for both Child and Adult Safeguarding.

I retired from my role as Headteacher in the primary sector in 2020. I was involved in education for over 40 years and have loved every minute of it.

I see my current role with the Derry Diocese as a further continuation of the work I have been doing all my life.

The volunteers/employees and religious within our parishes who attend regular training give me great hope and inspiration for the future of safeguarding within our Church. Every training session enables attendees to reflect on their practices and roles within their own parishes. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for the parish priest/administrator to acknowledge the contribution of those volunteers. I know this is very much appreciated.

The NBSCCCI team provide great support and advice to all of us trainers and it is very reassuring to know that they are at the end of the phone or email. I feel connected to the wider team of trainers across the whole of Ireland through this ongoing support.

I believe I have been blessed throughout my life. I have a very supportive husband and during the busy training periods, which mean me being out at nights and weekends, we are like passing ships in the night.

My family are my whole life. We have been blessed with 4 children and 4 grandchildren.

My most happy place is being wherever the grandchildren are ie gaelic, hurling, soccer, swimming, choir... and cheering them on.

I have chosen this photo of me with my eldest grandson Caodhan. We were at the recent Grandparents Mass and Assembly in his primary school. Faith and Family are my very core.



Briège in a favourite photo.

Br Ray Dwyer of the Presentation

Brothers writes: As a newly appointed Trainer for the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, I conducted a training session with ten persons connected with the Presentation Brothers and the L.E.A.F project, which is run for the Mardyke House here in Cork City. I was ably assisted by Elaine from the Diocese of Cork and Ross. The session covered the following areas: Why do we safeguard? Safeguarding in action; Recognising, Responding, Recording and reporting and finally evaluation and close.

The overall session took approximately three hours which included a 15 minute break between the second and third session, this gave the participants a chance to have a cup of tea and stretch the legs.

The participants engaged with the process and asked relevant questions and seek clarifications on the roles of DLP and Mandated Persons.

Overall, the training went over well.



Br Raymond Dwyer of the Presentation Order

Child Abuse: From Recognition → Response

In last season's newsletter, we explored how to recognise the signs of child abuse, including an overview of the different and often expanding forms it can take.

[Spring edition NBSCCCI 2026](#)

Recognising these signs is a vital first step, but knowing how to respond is just as important.

If a child or young person shares a concern, or you notice something that does not feel right, your response can make a significant difference. It is important to:

- Listen carefully and stay calm; allow the child to speak in their own words without interruption
- Reassure them; let them know they have done the right thing by speaking up
- Avoid making promises, particularly around confidentiality, as information may need to be shared to keep them safe
- Record concerns accurately; noting what was said, using the child's own words where possible
- Report promptly, follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures and pass concerns to the designated safeguarding lead

It is also important to remember that signs of abuse are not always obvious. Changes in behaviour, withdrawal, increased anxiety, or shifts in online activity can all indicate that something may be wrong.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and taking action, even when you are unsure, helps ensure children and young people are protected at the earliest opportunity.

If you are ever unsure, please seek advice and report your concerns in line with safeguarding procedures.

You could also find yourself responding to an individual—now an adult—disclosing abuse that happened in the past (non-recent abuse). This can be especially sensitive and requires a thoughtful, trauma-informed response.

If someone shares a non-recent experience of abuse:

- Listen with empathy and respect
 - Take what they say seriously
 - Do not question or challenge their account
- Acknowledge their courage
 - Recognise that speaking up often after many years can be incredibly difficult
- Avoid judgement or defensiveness
 - Do not attempt to minimise their experience or explain it away
 - Avoid discussing the alleged perpetrator or institution in a way that could be perceived as dismissive
- Be clear about your role and responsibilities
 - Explain gently that you may need to share the information with safeguarding authorities
 - Do not promise to keep the disclosure confidential
- Offer support and signposting
 - Encourage them to access support services (e.g., counselling, support organisations)
 - Provide information on how to report to statutory authorities if they wish
- Record and report appropriately
 - Follow your Church's safeguarding policy
 - Pass the information to the designated safeguarding officer/lead
 - Where required, ensure it is referred to statutory services or relevant safeguarding bodies

It is important to recognise that non-recent abuse disclosures may still present current safeguarding risks, particularly if the alleged perpetrator has access to children or vulnerable individuals.

Ongoing Vigilance

Ongoing vigilance within the Church community means maintaining a consistent, shared commitment to safeguarding the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults in all aspects of Church life. This involves staying alert to changes in behaviour, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and continually reflecting on whether environments, activities and relationships remain safe and supportive. It also means ensuring safeguarding policies are actively followed—not just in response to concerns, but as part of everyday practice—through regular training, open communication, and a culture where concerns can be raised without hesitation. By fostering an environment of awareness, accountability and care, the Church can create a space where everyone feels protected, respected and confident that their safety is a priority. As Pope Leo XIV wrote at the opening of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors plenary session on the 16th, "Prevention," the Pope explained, involves forming communities where concern for the safety and dignity of others arises naturally from faith. Such a culture takes shape when people are willing to listen to the suffering of others and allow those experiences to move them to action.

NBSCCCI ANNUAL REPORT 2025

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (known as the NBSCCCI) has published its annual report for 2025. As the NBSCCCI is moving to calendar year reporting, this report covers the last 9 months of 2025.

“There has been a small decrease, pro rata, in the number of new allegations notified to the National Board,” said Aidan Gordon, CEO. “The total was 178 over the nine months covered by the report. The previous full year figure was 385 in 2024/25.”

As has been the pattern in recent years the vast majority of the allegations relate to the period from 1960 to 1989. Only 4 relate to the period post-2000. This should be caveated with the fact that 10 did not have a definite timeframe attributed to them. This annual report also includes a breakdown of the types of abuse alleged and the status of those against whom the allegations have been made. Excluding 3 whose status is unknown, 115 (66%) of respondents are deceased. Of the remainder, 9 (5%) are in prison, a further 11 (6%) are subject to a management plan, while 31 (18%) have either been laicised, have left the Church body, or are out of ministry.

A key achievement for the NBSCCCI in 2025 was the success of the biannual conference, which ran from the 3rd to the 5th of September 2025, titled “Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice Process of Engagement with Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland.” This conference brought together survivors, academics, Church leaders, and members of safeguarding teams within religious congregations and dioceses. It explored new frameworks for genuine engagement, and we were challenged to consider the potential further harm experienced by survivors and victims of child abuse when met with inadequate responses in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Over this period, the number of requests for safeguarding advice was 179.

A core part of ensuring that safeguarding practice meets best standards is captured in the review function of the NBSCCCI’s work. The Directors are very pleased to report that with the employment of the Director of Safeguarding, work began in July 2025 on a methodology for the next tranche of reviews. The safeguarding reviews, which will examine safeguarding structures and compliance with the Church safeguarding policy: *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*, are planned to commence in 2026.

Reports of all previous Reviews can be found at
<https://www.safeguarding.ie/publications/national-board-publications>

Upcoming Training Events

Our next Train the Trainer course in child safeguarding will take place in **January/February 2027**.. The event requires a minimum of 10 attendees in order to go ahead.

Location: Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

Attendance at all sessions is required to complete the course.

Dates:

Wednesday 20th January, 18:30- 20:30 via Zoom

Saturday and Sunday 23rd and 24th January 09:30-16:00 in Person

Wednesday 10th February, 18:30- 20:30 via Zoom

Saturday and Sunday 13th and 14th February, 09:30-16:00 in Person

The training course is only for those who you wish to become registered trainers for three years with the NBSCCCI.

As the Church body, you must appoint and approve any delegate you wish to nominate.

The content of the programme will include:

- Context, Group work skills and facilitation skills
- Delivering the safeguarding children programme
- Assessment by a tutor and peers
- Final assessment by a tutor registered with the NBSCCCI

Costs

Cost for one attendee: €950

Cost for two attendees from same Diocese/Order: €1500

Cost for three attendees from the same Diocese/Order: €2000

Full price to be paid on completion of the course. Please note terms and conditions

[Terms and Conditions of attendance](#)

For those who would like to attend, please email admin@safeguarding.ie for more information.

Changes to Church Authorities

The NBSCCCI provides regular advice to Church authorities and organises an induction for new Church leaders annually. When a Church leader changes it is important that you inform us and provide us with the contact details of the new Church leader by emailing admin@safeguarding.ie.

Our website provides links to Designated Liaison Person's within each diocese along with contact details for additional help and support. If you notice any errors in any of this information, please contact us so that we can make the appropriate amendments.

Magnifica Humanitas (2026)

Pope Leo XIV's first encyclical, Magnifica Humanitas (2026), offered us all a powerful and timely reflection on human dignity, technology, and the future of society in the age of artificial intelligence when it was released on Monday the 25th of May 2026. His wonderful document places the rapid development of AI within the broader tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, reminding all of us that technological progress must always serve the human person and the common good, not replace or diminish them.

The themes of the encyclical were brought into practical focus in Natalie Doherty's workshop, Artificial Intelligence in a Church Safeguarding Context," presented by the NBSCCCI in Renehan Hall, Maynooth on the 27th of May 2026. Natalie helped us all in attendance to explore both the opportunities and risks of AI in pastoral ministry, including its impact on safeguarding policy and practice.

Natalie described how the encyclical affirmed that human dignity is God-given and cannot be reduced to data or efficiency and that Pope Leo warns against a "culture of power" where technology dominates human decision-making. Instead, he calls for ethical responsibility, transparency, and governance to ensure AI remains a tool guided by human conscience and compassion.

A key theme in the encyclical is the need for discernment and balance. Using the biblical images of the Tower of Babel and Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem, the Pope contrasts self-driven technological ambition with a vision of shared responsibility that builds a more humane world.

The encyclical outlines several major concerns:

- The risk of misinformation and manipulation of truth in an AI-driven world
- The impact of technology on work, with a strong defence of human labour and dignity
- The need to protect children and vulnerable people, especially from online exploitation and harmful digital content
- The danger of delegating moral or life-and-death decisions to machines

particularly relevant for safeguarding, Magnifica Humanitas highlights the growing risks in digital environments, including grooming, exploitation, and manipulation through AI technologies. It calls for education in digital literacy, stronger protections for young people, and accountability from technology providers.

The document ultimately proposes a hopeful vision: a shift from a "culture of power" to a "civilisation of love," rooted in solidarity, justice, and care for the vulnerable. It invites individuals and communities to become active builders of a future where technology enhances—not replaces—human relationships.

Natalie is the Diocesan Faith Development Coordinator for Youth and Young Adult Ministry in the Archdiocese of Dublin. Watch Natalie in an interview with Wendy Grace of The Way [here](#), where she unpacks more of the encyclical and to read the full Magnifica Humanitas [here](#)



Magnifica Humanitas (2026) released by Pope Leo on the 25th of May 2026.

A Monument to Mothers and Babies at Sean Ross Abbey

Tina Dooley is a survivor of Sean Ross Abbey Mother and Baby home in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. Tina and her friends, Michael Donovan, Bridget Maher and Maureen Sullivan have come together to erect a specially commissioned and locally crafted monument in the Angels plot of Sean Ross Abbey in remembrance of the mothers and babies who died there.



A service of remembrance will be held at Sean Ross Abbey, Corville, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, E53X012 on Saturday, 29th August 2026 at 2 pm, officiated by Fr John Molloy, Roscrea Parish, and the monument will be unveiled at this point.

Tina, Michael, Bridget and Maureen would like to extend an invitation to all survivors of Mother and Baby homes, their families and friends, including anyone living outside of Ireland, to join this special occasion of reflection, remembrance and solidarity. They would also like to thank everyone who has supported this initiative.

Trust and Dialogue in the Catholic Church: Rethinking Power and Relationship Dynamics

The Centre for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Adults is happy to announce our upcoming international conference “Trust and Dialogue in the Catholic Church: Rethinking Power and Relationship Dynamics”

Date: 13 – 16 October 2026

Location: Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada

Languages: English and French

In the wake of recent scandals, the Catholic Church faces a renewed call to become more trustworthy — a call that engages the challenges of cultural transformation and the rising demand for honesty, transparency, and shared responsibility. This journey requires a profound reexamination of how power is understood and exercised within relationships, a task marked by both theological depth and pressing pastoral urgency.

This conference is part of the International Project “Towards a Trustworthy Church”. The main researchers of this project are Dr. Karlijn Demasure (Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada) and Dr. Sheila McMahon (University of San Diego, USA). The conference also invites the facilitators of the Restorative Dialogue groups from 4 continents and 14 countries. To find out more about this important event. <https://ustpaul.ca/en/event/international-conference-trust-and-dialogue-in-the-catholic-church-rethinking-power-and-relationship-dynamics/>

Training Returns

The NBSCCCI report on training across the country and these figures are included in our Annual Report 2025. The training returns are an important part of monitoring our practice and ensuring we are actively keeping up to date with our safeguarding responsibilities. Completing training returns should be done following each training session; this will make it easier for you as trainers to keep track of where and whom you trained, along with eliminating a bigger task at the year-end. Registering for training is very simple and can be completed in a matter of minutes on the NBSCCCI website. One key point for sessions where two trainers deliver in partnership is to agree which trainer will record the training on the site. One trainer can then complete on both trainers' behalf. Trainers can log their training by:

Using the trainers' login button on www.safeguarding.ie given to each trainer as part of their registration.

Following log in, click the 'log a training event online' button on the top right-hand side of the screen. Filling in the relevant details and then submit.

The event will automatically be added to the database.

NBSCCCI GAP Paper 13: Child Safeguarding and Supervision

The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) published GAP Paper 13: Child Safeguarding and Supervision on 9 June 2026. This gap paper was an important step in promoting supervision as a vital and practical step in supporting safeguarding across the Church. *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024* highlights this essential role.

This paper emphasises that effective safeguarding is not achieved through policy alone, but through ongoing supervision that supports accountability, reflection, and good practice. Supervision is described as a structured process that ensures those involved in ministry are supported to work safely, ethically, and competently.

A key message is that supervision fulfills three overlapping functions:

- Accountability (managerial): ensuring safeguarding procedures and standards are followed
- Learning (formative): developing skills, knowledge, and professional judgement
- Support (restorative): helping individuals manage the emotional impact of safeguarding work

The paper identifies three key types of supervision: managerial, reflective, and supportive, which together create a balanced approach to safeguarding. It highlights the importance of reflective practice, enabling those involved in safeguarding to think critically, recognise risks, and make well-informed, child-centred decisions.

Leadership is identified as central to effective safeguarding. Bishops, clergy, and safeguarding personnel are called to ensure supervision structures are in place, helping to embed a culture of transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility across all Church activities.

The paper also acknowledges ongoing challenges, including reliance on volunteers, limited resources, and the need to foster a culture where concerns can be openly discussed. At the same time, it stresses that supervision plays a vital role in preventing burnout and supporting wellbeing, particularly given the emotional demands of safeguarding work.

Key message: Supervision is a cornerstone of effective safeguarding, ensuring that policies are actively lived out in practice, and that all those involved are supported in creating safe, respectful environments for children.

Department of Children

On the 20th of May 2026, Minister Norma Foley announced the appointment of Dr. Aisling Parkes as Special Rapporteur on Child Protection for a two-year term until 19 May 2028.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection is appointed by the Government to provide independent oversight of child protection systems, legal developments, and policy implementation.

The role involves preparing annual reports examining the impact of national and international legal developments on child protection, as well as thematic reports on specific issues. These reports are submitted to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, approved by the Government, and laid before the Oireachtas for publication. The Special Rapporteur works independently but collaborates with stakeholders to ensure that the perspectives and rights of children inform recommendations for reform.

Dr. Parkes is a senior academic and researcher in domestic child law and international children's rights in UCC, with over twenty years' experience in informing policy and legal developments in the areas of child and family law, children's rights, child protection, and international human rights law.

You can read more about the office, work and previous reports from the Rapporteur here <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/collections/special-rapporteur-on-child-protection-reports/>

The National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland's "Irish Young People Decode AI" report brings together the considered views of 48 young people who participated in Citizens' Youth Juries examining the impact of artificial intelligence on their lives. It offers a powerful reminder that children and young people are not only users of digital technologies, but key voices in shaping how these environments should be made safer, fairer, and more accountable.

Across a range of themes—including AI chatbots, misinformation, education, and online safety—young people expressed both optimism about AI's potential and clear concerns about risks to wellbeing, trust, and protection. Of particular relevance for safeguarding in the Church are their concerns around young people turning to AI for emotional support, exposure to harmful or misleading content, and the need for stronger safeguards, transparency, and age-appropriate protections in digital spaces. The report highlights the importance of clear boundaries—for example, that AI tools should not replace trusted human support—and calls for greater AI literacy among both young people and parents.

The findings resonate strongly with our safeguarding mission within the Church: to listen to children's lived experiences and ensure that emerging risks—particularly in digital and online environments—are understood and addressed. This report is a valuable reminder that safeguarding must continue to evolve, equipping those who minister and work with children to respond thoughtfully to the opportunities and challenges of an AI-shaped world. To read the full report <https://www.youth.ie/resources/>

International Safeguarding Conference 2026: One Commitment, Many Contexts

From 16–19 June 2026, two members of the National Office team Lyn and Julie had the privilege of attending the International Safeguarding Conference at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Bringing together safeguarding professionals, academics, Church leaders, researchers and practitioners from around the world, the conference focused on the theme “One Commitment, Many Contexts: Safeguarding Across Cultures.” The event explored how the universal commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults must be understood and implemented within diverse cultural landscapes.

While the keynote presentations and expert discussions offered some useful insights, one of the most enriching aspects of the conference was the opportunity to work closely with colleagues from across the globe. The participant group reflected the true international spirit of the gathering, with religious and lay individuals representing countries stretching from Austria to Australia, and from Côte d’Ivoire to Indonesia. This diversity brought a richness to our conversations that no lecture alone could provide.



Lyn and Julie with Sr. Annah Theresa Nyadombo and Theresa Sanyatwe.

A key learning for us was the importance of recognising that safeguarding principles such as transparency, accountability and compliance may be universal, but cultural, social and historical contexts often shape their application. Hearing how safeguarding challenges are experienced and addressed in different countries highlighted both the complexity of the work and the shared commitment that unites us as practitioners worldwide.

The group work created a space where assumptions could be challenged respectfully and where different perspectives were welcomed. Colleagues shared experiences from communities with distinct traditions, resources and safeguarding infrastructures. Despite these differences, there was remarkable agreement on the need to place the dignity, safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable people at the centre of all safeguarding efforts. What stood out most was the value of listening. In our group work sessions, we confirmed that culture influences safeguarding practice and that effective solutions often emerge when diverse perspectives are brought together. The conference reinforced our conviction that safeguarding is not simply about policies and procedures; it is about relationships, understanding and a willingness to learn from one another.



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle giving a keynote address at the opening of the conference

The theme, “One Commitment, Many Contexts,” was therefore more than a conference title—it was something we experienced first-hand. Working alongside participants from different continents reminded us that while our contexts may differ, our responsibility is shared. The global nature of safeguarding requires collaboration, humility and openness to learning from others.

As we left Rome, we carried away not only new knowledge and ideas but also renewed confidence in the strength of international cooperation. The friendships formed and the conversations shared demonstrated that some of the most meaningful learning happens when people come together across cultures, united by a common purpose: creating safer environments for all.

Be Cyber Safe NI

Be Cyber Safe NI – Young People Shaping Online Safety

A recent youth-led project, Be Cyber Safe NI, delivered by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC, has highlighted to all of us again the importance of listening to young people when developing online safety and safeguarding approaches. Our current generation is growing up online, and this project aimed to support young people aged 14 to 17 to have a direct influence on policy, education resources and safeguarding campaigns.

What Young People Told the project.

Young people described through their engagement that the online world is an essential part of their everyday life, offering opportunities to learn, connect and socialise, while also exposing them to risks such as cyberbullying, harmful content, scams and unwanted contact. They stressed that online safety should focus on both protection and opportunity, rather than simply restricting access.

Key concerns included:

- Online safety education often starts too late.
- Reporting harmful content is difficult and young people rarely receive feedback.
- Fearful or punitive adult reactions can discourage children from seeking help.
- Online platforms need to take greater responsibility for user safety.

What Helps Young People Feel Safe

Young people consistently said they feel safer when:

- Adults remain calm and listen without judgement.
- Rules and online safety measures are explained clearly.
- Reporting tools are easy to find and use.
- They are reassured that experiencing online harm is not their fault.

Key Recommendations

The project identified four priorities for improving online safety:

1. Earlier, more engaging online safety education in schools.
2. Support for parents and carers to build trust-based conversations and respond calmly when concerns arise.
3. Simpler, more effective reporting systems with clear feedback for users.
4. Greater accountability for online platforms, including involving young people in designing safety measures.

Impact on Safeguarding Practice

Young people's views have already influenced online safety policy discussions and safeguarding initiatives. Their feedback directly shaped revisions to the Trust Trap: You're Not to Blame campaign from the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and PSNI, demonstrating the value of genuine co-production with young people. Ministerial departments also confirmed that insights from the project will help inform future online safety strategy and safeguarding work.

Safeguarding takeaway: Building trusted relationships, encouraging open conversations and responding calmly when concerns are raised remain key protective factors in helping children and young people stay safe online.

Good Practice Corner

On the 30th of April the staff of the NBSCCCI had the pleasure of hosting a Zoom meeting with some of the safeguarding team leads for the Sisters of Mercy in Kenya and South Africa. The Congregation's International Child Safeguarding Policy emphasises creating environments where children and vulnerable people are welcomed, listened to, treated fairly and kept safe.

In Kenya, the Sisters of Mercy have a long history of service in education, healthcare, skills development and pastoral ministry. Much of their current work is focused in communities facing significant social and economic hardship, including urban informal settlements, rural areas affected by drought and communities living with the ongoing impact of HIV/AIDS. Their ministries include schools, health clinics, support for orphaned and vulnerable children, prison outreach and accompaniment of displaced people and refugees.

Safeguarding in these contexts often means being a consistent and trusted presence in the lives of children and families. During our meeting, the sisters and ministry staff spoke of their work ensuring as much as possible that children have access to education, healthcare and supportive relationships while promoting awareness of children's rights and wellbeing. The Congregation's safeguarding framework provides guidance for safe recruitment, training, reporting concerns and maintaining safe environments in all Mercy ministries.

In South Africa, the Sisters of Mercy are engaged in ministries that include education, healthcare, shelters for women and children, services for survivors of abuse and trafficking, care for orphans and vulnerable children, prison ministry and support for refugees and unemployed workers. Their work often places them alongside those who are experiencing exclusion, violence or instability.

The sisters' commitment to safeguarding was evident in our discussions, as they described creating safe spaces where young people can access support, protection, and growth opportunities. Whether in shelters, community centres, educational programmes or pastoral outreach, safeguarding principles guide interactions and decision-making. The sisters recognise that genuine safeguarding involves not only responding to risks but also empowering people, strengthening communities and restoring dignity.

Across both Kenya and South Africa, the Sisters on our call spoke about safeguarding being much more than compliance with policies and procedures. It is a commitment to seeing the dignity of every person, listening attentively to those who are vulnerable and creating environments where children and adults can flourish safely.

Despite daily challenges, the sisters continue to show remarkable dedication in building communities of care, protection and hope. If you would like to be included in this section of the newsletter please email lyn.mcdermott@safeguarding.ie

ASSIST NI Highlights the Importance of Victim Advocacy at NOTA All-Ireland Conference 2026

At the NOTA All Ireland Conference on 7 May 2026, delegates heard a powerful and thought-provoking presentation from Michelle Martin, Director of Services at ASSIST NI, entitled "Responding to Disclosures of Sexual and Domestic Abuse." The session focused on the critical role professionals play when victims first disclose abuse and highlighted the vital support provided by ASSIST NI throughout the criminal justice process.

ASSIST NI is a Northern Ireland-wide domestic and sexual abuse advocacy service, dedicated to supporting victims and survivors who are engaging with the criminal justice system. The organisation works to ensure that victims are not left to navigate complex investigations, court proceedings and support services alone.

During the presentation, Michelle emphasised that disclosures of abuse are rarely straightforward or linear. Victims may disclose historical, current or ongoing abuse, provide additional information over time, or face multiple barriers to engagement. Professionals were encouraged to recognise that behaviour can be a form of communication and to remain alert to signs of harm, even when disclosures are indirect.

A key theme of the session was the importance of how professionals respond when someone discloses abuse. Delegates were reminded that they may only have one opportunity to create a safe environment for disclosure. The presentation stressed the need to move beyond simply being "non-judgemental" and instead adopt a consciously self-aware approach, grounded in professional responsibility. Victims should be validated through both belief and action, with practitioners considering risk, timelines, perpetrators and the potential for future harm.

The conference also highlighted the complexity of the criminal justice journey for victims of domestic and sexual abuse. ASSIST NI advocates provide support at every stage, including risk assessment, safety planning, referrals to specialist services, court preparation and ongoing advocacy. Their work often extends beyond criminal justice processes to address housing needs, mental health support, family issues, post-separation abuse and access to wider community services.

ASSIST NI's approach was described as "True Criminal Justice Advocacy", ensuring that victims understand their rights and entitlements, have access to special measures where appropriate, and receive support in engaging with agencies such as police, prosecution services and witness support services. The organisation also works with a wide range of partners to safeguard victims and reduce the risk of further harm.

The presentation concluded with four clear messages for professionals: be aware of personal bias, act with professional responsibility, recognise the significance of individual circumstances and timelines, and remember that timely, informed responses can prevent further harm and save lives.

The session provided a valuable reminder of the essential role that advocacy services such as ASSIST NI play in supporting victims and survivors, and the difference that informed, compassionate and effective professional responses can make. Read more about the work of this organisation on <https://assistni.org.uk/>

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