



The Lisa Maria Foundation

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG

Press Release 30th June 2024 – Recommendations for change in the POMA law

Protecting children and youth against abuse and harm is society's duty. Since it was set up, The Lisa Maria Foundation has incessantly continued to work on creating awareness about the abuse and harm of children. To date, it continues to create opportunities and resources for safeguarding in organisations and lobby for more stringent laws and national policies to address and prioritise the subject of safeguarding.

In 2023, the Lisa Maria Foundation proposed a number of changes to the Minister of Justice, Dr Jonathan Attard in relation to the Protection of Minors (Registration) Act, Chapter 518 in the Laws of Malta. These recommendations are aimed at strengthening safe recruitment procedures and engagement of individuals who work with children and youth by ensuring this law becomes more inclusive, comprehensive and accessible.

A simplification of the process that organisations who work with children undertake when verifying that a potential employee or volunteer is not on the offenders' register is imperative. The current process is cumbersome and it might take the organisation several months to know the outcome of the verification process. Apart from this being a major recruitment obstacle for organisations, this drawn-out process can act as a barrier to safety checking. Requests for safety checks should be rigorous and thorough but simultaneously, the entire process should be simple and efficient. The Foundation have discussed potential ways for this to be so.

Moreover, the law should specify that a criminal record check should be provided by foreign nationals from their home country when they are in employment involving children in Malta,. Checking locally will only provide reassurances that the person is not on the local register, thus covering only the time that the person has been residing in Malta. The Lisa Maria Foundation has put forward other recommendations: (a) enforcement of checks of employees not just at the point of engagement; (b) offenders on the register should be required to provide details of their place of employment or voluntary work; (c) the scheduled offences for being on the register should be comprehensive for crimes against youth up to 18 and not 16; and (d) organisations which dismiss an employee or volunteer due to safeguarding issues should be obliged to report the case to a National Independent Safeguarding Body.

Discussions with the Ministry for Justice are ongoing but The Lisa Maria Foundation would like to reiterate its position that safeguarding **IS** a collective responsibility and every effort should be made to have such preventative measures in place which ensure safer spaces for children and youth. A delay in addressing the legal issues is a delay in protecting children and young people.

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