



Audit report
on the Paris
Foreign
Missions
Society

GCPS Consulting
November 2024

Acknowledgements

The audit team would like to thank the many people who contributed to this complex process.

First of all, we would like to thank everyone who contacted the team via the dedicated address, and especially the victims for their invaluable testimonies. We know how difficult it can be to come face to face with a potentially traumatic experience.

We would like to thank the Superior General, Vincent Sénéchal, and the members of the MEP Permanent Council for their trust, their welcome, their availability, and for giving us access to the information and documents we needed to complete our work.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the group leaders, MEP missionary priests and diocesan priests for their time and logistical support during visits to the mission countries.

NB The English version of this audit report is a translation from the original French report.

Glossary

Abuse of power: means the misuse of position, function or authority to take advantage of another person. This can take many forms and includes situations where one person has power over another by virtue of their relationship (for example, employer and employee, teacher and student, coach and athlete, parent or guardian and child, clergy/religious and parishioner) and uses that power to their advantage.

Adult: means any person aged 18 or over. When used, it is an inclusive term referring to all adults, including vulnerable adults.

Sexual assault (French law): Sexual assault is a sexual act, without penetration, imposed by one person on another. This offence is committed when the perpetrator has used violence, threats, physical or psychological coercion or has acted by surprise.

Allegation: refers to a claim, yet to be verified, that someone has committed violence against a child or adult. The term is used interchangeably with the words "complaint" and "report".

Conflict of interest: refers to situations (perceived or real) where a conflict arises between a person's official duties and their private interests, which could influence the performance of those official duties. Such a conflict usually involves opposing principles or incompatible wishes or needs and may arise when staff hold more than one position.

Children: refers to people under the age of 18. The term is used interchangeably with the word "minors".

Exploitation: deliberate abuse, manipulation or misuse of power and control over another person. It involves taking advantage of another person or situation, usually, but not always, for personal gain.

Sexual exploitation: Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited.¹

The term sexual exploitation is a generic term that encompasses a number of concepts, in particular those of paid sexual intercourse, proposed paid sexual intercourse and sexually exploitative relationship.

Paedocriminality: All crimes and offences of a sexual nature against children.

It includes any sexual assault committed with or without violence, coercion, threat or surprise (rape, sexual assault other than rape, incest, exhibition and sexual harassment), any sexual exploitation (procuring) or any offence against minors (corruption of minors, sexual propositions to minors, sexual offences against minors, fixation, recording or transmission of the image of a minor of a pornographic nature).

¹ United Nations definition, c/f UN ST/SGB 2003/19 <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/iasc-six-core-principles-relating-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-2019>

Safeguarding: taking all reasonable steps to prevent sexual violence from occurring, to protect people, particularly vulnerable adults and children, from harm, and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.

Survivor: term used interchangeably with "victim" to designate a person who has suffered violence or interpersonal trauma. This term gives an indication of agentivity, unlike "victim", which is why it is sometimes preferred to "victim".

Victim: refers to a person who has suffered violence or interpersonal trauma, while recognising that many do not describe themselves as having been abused, for complex and legitimate reasons.

Rape (French law): Rape is committed when an act of sexual penetration is imposed by one person on another. This crime is committed when the perpetrator uses violence, threats, physical or psychological coercion or surprise.

Sexual penetration may be vaginal, anal or oral-genital, and may involve sex, the fingers, another part of the body or an object.

Sexual violence: This covers situations in which one person forces another to perform acts or make comments of a sexual nature that have not been solicited. This term includes forced or attempted sexual intercourse (rape), touching of the private parts or forced kissing (sexual assault), exposing oneself naked (exhibitionism) or sexual harassment.

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Introduction

In July 2022, the General Assembly of the Paris Foreign Missions (MEP) took the decision to take action on the issue of sexual violence and the protection of minors and vulnerable adults in environments where the society² is active. This decision was taken in response to the work of the Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church (CIASE)³. This commission studied sexual violence committed within the Catholic Church in France from 1950 to 2021, estimated the number of victims over this period and made recommendations for the prevention and management of this violence. More generally, the MEP initiative comes at a time of growing awareness of the problem of sexual violence in French society and its institutions.

In 2022, the General Assembly of the MEP asked the Permanent Council to examine all available archives in order to draw up an inventory of potential cases of sexual violence against minors and vulnerable adults, from 1950 to the present day. The MEP Permanent Council initially planned to carry out this work internally, but given the scale of the task and the need for specific expertise, this exercise was finally entrusted to experts from outside the MEP.

The Permanent Council decided to call in the expert firm GPCS⁴ in February 2023. At the inception meeting between MEP and GCPS on 11 and 12 May 2023, it was agreed the objectives of the audit would be to:

1. Identify cases of sexual violence that may have occurred between 1950 and 2023.
2. Analyse the response of MEP to reported cases of sexual violence.
3. Evaluate past and current practices to prevent sexual violence.
4. Propose a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the measures taken by MEP and supporting its culture of protecting people.

It was also agreed that the audit would support, on the basis of recommendations, the development of an action plan to strengthen safeguarding measures⁵ within MEP and to support the culture of personal protection.

² The term "society" refers to the missionary society of the MEP.

³ <https://www.ciase.fr/rapport-final/>

⁴ <https://gcps.consulting/>

⁵ The auditors have chosen to use the word safeguarding in this report, even though it is in English, as there is no equivalent word in French. Safeguarding is an approach that encompasses all the measures implemented to prevent the risk of violence against individuals and the management of allegations of violence received. In this case, we are talking about the prevention and management of cases of sexual violence.

Context

The Paris Foreign Missions Society

The Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) is a society of apostolic life founded in the 17th century⁶. A community of priests, it was dedicated to evangelisation in Asia and the Indian Ocean. The first MEP missionary priests founded missions and trained local catechists, establishing the first structures of the local Church in several Asian countries. They carried out and continue to carry out their missions in sometimes extremely difficult conditions. Some have been imprisoned, expelled, persecuted and church property sometimes destroyed or looted (including local archives).

The missions founded by the MEP have gradually become inculturated and are now fully part of the local Church: "In their mission territories, the members of the society are, in all that concerns their apostolic ministry, under the authority of the diocesan bishop".⁷ At the same time, the MEP, who focused mainly on training local clergy, also became involved in inter-religious dialogue, social work, health and education activities, sometimes in support of ethnic minorities, refugees, internally displaced persons or migrants.

Since 1950, 1491 priests have served with the MEP. Today, the MEP has 141 priests in 15 countries⁸. The MEP priests receive the announcement of their mission country at their ordination and the particularity of the society is that their destination is for life. They spend the first three years of their priesthood mainly acquiring the language and learning the culture in which they are immersed. MEP priests are under contract to their host diocese. However, they are also dependent on the MEP Society.

⁶ On 29 July 1658, Pope Alexander VII appointed François Pallu and Pierre Lambert de la Motte as the first Apostolic Vicars for Asia. This was the official beginning of the MEP, establishing their headquarters in Paris.

⁷ Constitutions and Directory of the Paris Foreign Missions Society

⁸ <https://missionsetrangeres.com/histoire-des-mep/>

Methodology

Scope of the audit

At a workshop held in May 2023, the Permanent Council and the GCPS team defined the objectives of the audit and the methodology to be followed. The team worked on the basis of precise terms of reference. In June 2023, the Permanent Council proposed that the audit team visit all the MEP mission countries to meet the priests and the local church, where possible, and to take part in certain activities. The objectives of these visits were to :

- Understand the MEP environment,
- Evaluate safeguarding practices and risks linked to parish contexts, activities or projects managed by the MEP, their employees, and the many volunteers sent out each year,
- Evaluate which channels would be appropriate for receiving reports from mission countries, and in particular the possibility of using hotlines,⁹
- Collect data, gather testimonies about cases of sexual violence.

The audit involves identifying cases of sexual violence that may have involved MEP priests since 1950, and that constitute a criminal offence under the law applicable to these cases at the time they were allegedly committed. This may involve any type of sexual crime and/or offence, including rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment (see appendix for changes in legal definitions over the period). The inventory of cases concerns both sexual violence against minors and adults.

The audit also aimed to assess, on the basis of the documentation and information available, the management of these cases with regard to internal procedures, the law and the directives of the Holy See, as well as accepted standards in the field of safeguarding.

Finally, the audit proposes a diagnosis of the practices of the MEP society in terms of prevention. It is based on the universal guidelines defined by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in the fight against abuse.¹⁰

From a geographical point of view, the audit team visited the MEP headquarters at rue du Bac in Paris, the MEP retirement home in Lauris, France and 11 mission countries. The audit team was also able to observe certain activities and projects managed by the MEP priests in the mission dioceses and parishes.

It is important to note that the purpose of the audit was not to investigate any allegations or facts brought to its attention or that the auditors may have identified during the exercise. The audit work is distinct from that of an internal administrative enquiry, which is the responsibility of the Superior General, according to the Constitutions of the MEP

⁹ Telephone line set up by an organisation to answer questions and receive reports.

¹⁰ Act No. CCXCVII, on the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, 26 March 2019, Guidelines for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, 26 March 2019, Universal Guidelines, Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons, March 2024.

and its charter of deontology and pastoral conduct. The concerns that the audit team was able to identify during the exercise were shared confidentially with the Permanent Council for its action, in the interests of protecting victims, witnesses and sources. In addition, so as not to impact ongoing investigations or create confusion, the GCPS audit team did not interview any of the people implicated by the French justice system.

Data collection and analysis

In August 2023, the audit team developed tools to organise data collection and analysis. From September 2023 to September 2024, it collected information with a view to listing potential or proven cases of sexual violence involving MEP priests since 1950 and then analysing the response made by the MEP.

During this period, the audit team also collected data with a view to assessing the MEP's safeguarding practices, an analysis of which is provided in this report.

Data was collected through :

- Minutes of meetings of the Permanent Council,
- Consultation of the MEP archives in Paris,
- Consulting files on specific cases,
- Consultation and analysis of other documents.

This was supplemented by individual interviews, mostly face-to-face or sometimes by videoconference, with many MEP priests, including the most senior ones, local clergy, MEP employees, employees of the MEP volunteer service, volunteers in their mission countries or former volunteers, former seminarians and volunteers in France and in the mission countries visited.

A specific email, managed by the audit team, was also created and circulated for anyone wishing to contact the audit team and share their experience or thoughts in a confidential and independent manner. Finally, a call for testimonies was issued by the MEP on their website and in the countries where the assignments were carried out, in various languages. It was also disseminated via the MEP Review, through the network of former volunteers, to all volunteers in post at the time of the audit, to French-speaking parishes and to most MEP houses.

In order to identify the cases, the audit team first had to find in the minutes of the weekly meetings of the MEP permanent council¹¹ during the audit period, any information that could be linked to a potential case of sexual violence involving an MEP priest or any anomaly in the life of a priest (interruption or exclusion from a mission, for example).

As acts of sexual violence are often not described explicitly in the council minutes, the consultants had to note all the situations where the behaviour of a priest might have seemed problematic or atypical (interruption or exclusion from a mission, mention of a monition or reference to a canon that deals with sexual violence or sexual activity. The result is a list of names of priests.

¹¹ The MEP Permanent Council is the decision-making and management body. It meets every week.

Based on these names, the audit team searched other archive documents for additional information, which in most cases enabled them to obtain more details and clarify whether or not sexual violence had actually occurred. The auditors also attempted to corroborate certain information during interviews.

This triangulation work in several stages made it possible to rule out certain names and to try to qualify the cases detected. In order to rule on each case and to analyse the response made by the MEP society to the concerns brought to its attention, the audit developed a tool considering several indicators enabling the incident to be analysed, its management and trends to be established.

At a workshop held in June 2024, the audit team presented its preliminary findings using the universal guidelines developed by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. This report is a continuation and expansion of those preliminary findings.

Key figures

Consultation of historical documents

It is difficult to give an exact number of files or documents consulted. The minutes of the Permanent Council for the period 1950-2024 constitute approximately 3,796 documents. In addition, nearly 350 priests' personal files were consulted, as well as files relating to certain missions and around twenty files relating to incidents documented by the Permanent Council.

Analysis of institutional documents

Many of the documents consulted and analysed are from the MEP, but also from the Catholic authorities in France, the dioceses of the mission countries and the Vatican, providing an understanding of the institutional and procedural context.

Interviews

Just under 200 interviews (196) were carried out and documented as part of the audit, some at the request of the GCPS audit team in Paris, Lauris¹² and in the mission countries, others at the request of individuals who contacted the audit team via the dedicated email. Around half of the interviews (99) concerned MEP priests in France and in their mission countries. No priests from the diaspora¹³ were contacted. The other half of the interviews were conducted with lay people (volunteers, employees) as well as non-MEP priests, diocesan representatives and sisters.

Visits

The GCPS consultants visited the MEP retirement home in the South of France as well as 11 mission countries: Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Madagascar, Mauritius, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Laos.

¹² In the retirement home for MEP priests

¹³ Diaspora priests still belong to the MEP Society but are either retired or incardinated in different towns in France and abroad.

In order to optimise resources, the consultants did not visit countries where MEP had little or no presence. This was particularly the case in Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and India. The MEP priests based in these countries were interviewed via Zoom.

Principles

The GCPS audit team carried out its work guided by the following principles:

- Victim/survivor-centred approach - The audit team took care not to expose victims/survivors to further violence and ensured that their privacy, decisions and consent were respected when sharing their stories.
- Confidentiality - Confidentiality was a central and critical element in the conduct of the audit and required special precautions that were sometimes restrictive.
- Professionalism - The GCPS consultants based their analysis on the collection of factual data observed directly or corroborated by several documents or testimonies. Specific tools were developed to triangulate the information and ensure that all the people concerned were given the opportunity to express their views.
- Independence - The audit team had never worked with or for MEP prior to this audit. They carried out their work without any conflict of interest, in a spirit of transparency and independence, respected by the Permanent Council.
- Neutrality/objectivity - The consultants were constantly concerned with objectivity, identifying their own biases and not making value judgements.

The collegial approach, through constant exchanges, has helped to produce a rigorous analysis that respects these principles.

Please note

As mentioned above, MEP asked the audit team to examine potential cases of sexual violence through the prism of French criminal law. A categorisation of reports and allegations was therefore made with reference to French law in force at the time of the alleged offence. However, good practice in safeguarding follows standards that generally go beyond the framework of the law. Safeguarding standards, such as pontifical standards, take greater account of the imbalance of power that can exist between two people and consider that the age of consent is 18. Safeguarding is also concerned with misconduct that may not be in breach of criminal or canon law, but which may nevertheless represent serious violations of the institution's values, principles, beliefs and rules of conduct. Each allegation has, therefore, also been qualified in this way in order to provide a complete analysis.

Challenges encountered during the audit

The GCPS audit team was able to work in very good conditions throughout the audit. Access to the various places where the MEP works, to documents, to people and to MEP employees was facilitated by the permanent board and the MEP management. Carrying out the audit enabled a number of very rich exchanges with the permanent board and

people from very different backgrounds. However, the following difficulties linked to technical or historical aspects sometimes made the work more complicated.

Examination of archives and access to data

The files consulted do not all contain the same amount of information or documents. Some files, for example, are very brief, while others contain a great deal of correspondence.

The level of detail in the minutes of the Permanent Council varies according to the Secretary General who drafted them. They were not written in a standardised manner and were handwritten until 1974. This makes them difficult and time-consuming to read. The use of euphemisms and the terse nature of the information that had to be decoded sometimes meant that the information had to be interpreted or that more time was needed.

The data available on cases is almost always partial and does not necessarily allow us to confirm a claim or a potential case, despite the collection of available information. Some cases are insufficiently documented, particularly older cases.

Access to missions and communities

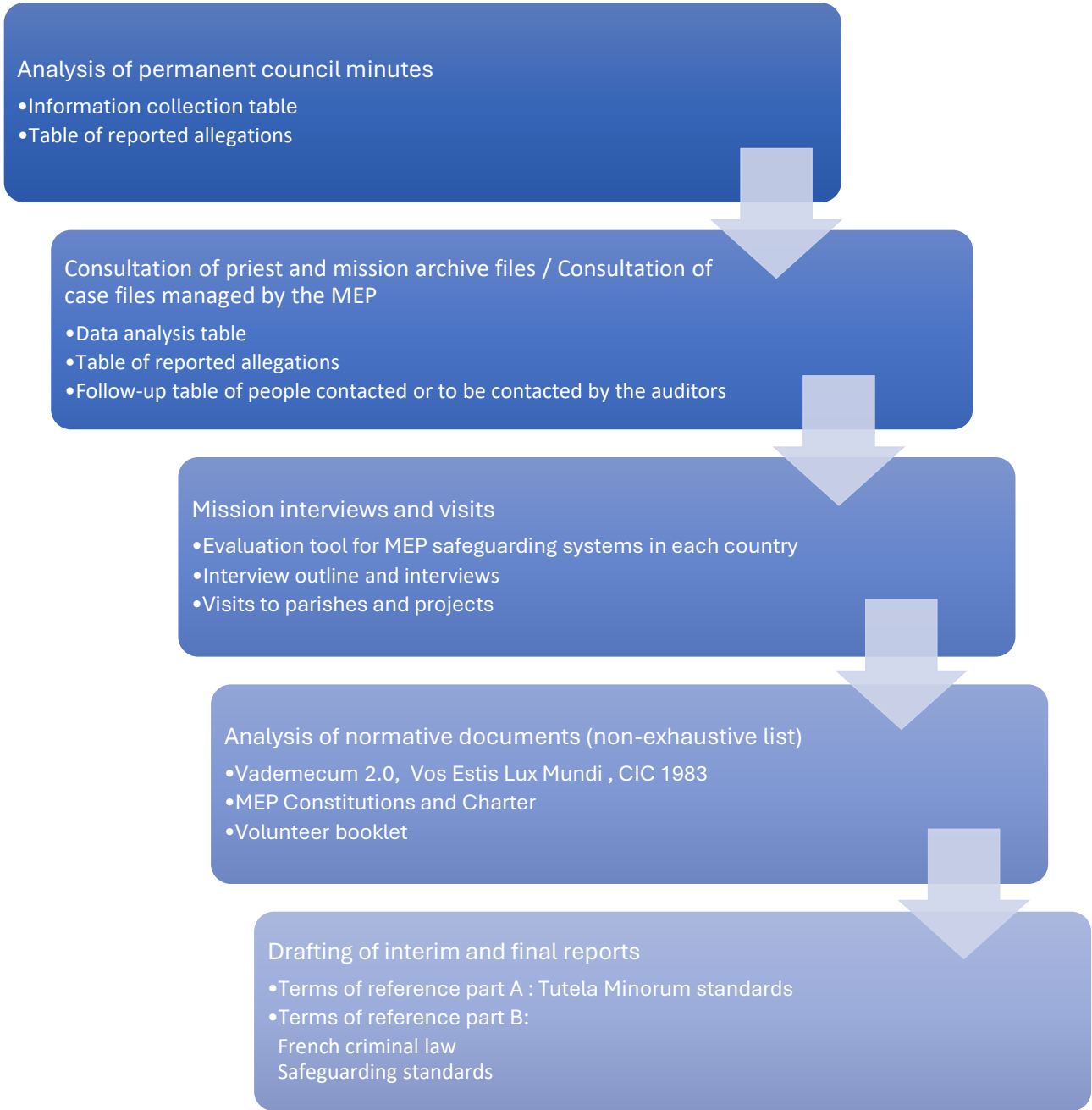
The board and the GCPS consultants have sometimes had to use their pedagogical skills to convince the local group leader and certain priests of the relevance and necessity of their coming to the mission country, or to get the priests to give up some of their time locally.

During the visits to the mission countries, the consultants visited as many places as possible, but were not able to visit all the localities where MEP priests are based due to lack of time, and for logistical or security reasons, when the areas were politically sensitive.

The consultants had limited access to the communities themselves because of the language, but also sometimes chose not to address the issue of sexual violence directly through consultations with these communities. It is inappropriate for visiting auditors to engage in discussions on these sensitive subjects with certain interlocutors, without prior discussions on the subject and without providing for follow-up after this initial discussion. This can have harmful effects, and be counterproductive to the establishment of a safe and protective environment.

The 'call to witness' drafted by the MEP has been translated into various languages, but its distribution in the mission countries has been very uneven. Some priests did not wish to distribute it, feeling uncomfortable with the approach and the way it might be perceived. In addition, there are not necessarily any MEP priests at present in parishes where there have been in previous years, which has also meant that distribution has been incomplete.

Summary table of the methodology used



PART A - ANALYSIS OF SAFEGUARDING PRACTICES AT THE PARIS FOREIGN MISSIONS SOCIETY

This section analyses the current practices of MEP in terms of safeguarding, in the light of the guidelines defined by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in March 2024¹⁴, which apply to the Universal Church, including clergy, societies of apostolic life and religious congregations.

The auditors formulated their observations by way of findings reflecting good practice as well as aspects requiring improvement, and proposed a list of recommendations for each theme.

¹⁴ Ibid.

1. Taking account of the protection of children and adults in the leadership and governance of MEP¹⁵

1.1. Board commitment needs to be better reflected in the organisation's culture

Finding 1: In recent years, the MEP Permanent Council has demonstrated, through its actions and communication, a clear commitment to combating sexual violence and its desire to improve its practices and standards in order to establish a culture of transparency and accountability so as to better protect the most vulnerable. Prior to this, the auditors noted few safeguarding initiatives or communications apart from responses to reports of alleged incidents of sexual violence. The Superior General had introduced some normative documents establishing the beginnings of a safeguarding framework from 2016. This system has been strengthened since the election of the current Superior General in 2021, the reforms introduced by the Church of France following the report of the independent commission on sexual abuse in the Church (CIASE), and those carried out by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons. This turning point is also linked to the allegations implicating certain MEP priests, which demanded strong measures, including investigations, on the part of the MEP Council¹⁶. The audit entrusted to the consultancy firm GCPS is also an indicator of the MEP's willingness to tackle the issue of sexual violence within the institution.

Finding 2: The fact that three MEP priests have been reported to the Public Prosecutor since 2022 and the formal decisions to conduct several internal investigations into cases brought to the attention of the Permanent Council, bear witness to the MEP's determination to apply zero tolerance to sexual violence. The auditors did not find, in the documents consulted, any similar precedents formalised in decisions to investigate and investigation reports, although some older cases were checked. In addition, the MEP Board and the Serious Information and Concern Assessment Board (the Assessment Board)¹⁷ (see 1.2 on governance structure) have taken up concerns reported by the audit team and have taken action to address these alerts.

Finding 3: The MEP website devotes a page to the safeguarding measures put in place by the MEP¹⁸. This page is still too brief, but it provides access to the MEP's Charter of Deontology for Pastoral Conduct (the Charter), to the website of the Commission of the Bishops of France dedicated to the fight against paedocriminality, as well as to the MEP's email dedicated to reports, to that of the Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CRR) and to that of France Victimes. An article dated 31 October 2023 also sets out the MEP's commitment to comply with French law and the Catholic Church's undertakings to combat sexual violence. The MEP has issued a number of press releases in response to certain media reports or when the Council has taken the initiative of reporting to the

¹⁵ The headings in Part A are inspired by the titles of the 10 universal guidelines of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and their criteria

¹⁶ See Part B for more information on the practices of MEP in terms of claims management, in particular section 3.2.

¹⁷ Whose role in incident management is described in the "Roadmap for MEP Protection Officers", dated 2/10 2024.

¹⁸ See: <https://missionsetrangeres.com/protection-des-plus-fragiles/>

Public Prosecutor. Lastly, in 2023, the MEP launched a call for testimonies, published on the MEP website and relayed in the mission countries.

The council's current determination to change the culture of the MEP society to ensure that it is safe for all, however, faces sometimes strong internal resistance, which the auditors noted through their interviews, while other priests, more aware of safeguarding issues, support this change.

Finding 4: During visits to mission dioceses, the audit documented individual initiatives by MEP priests demonstrating their commitment to preventing and responding to cases of abuse. For example, in the diocese where he is based, an MEP priest has developed training tools in the local language, contributed to the development of a policy for the protection of minors, and trained diocesan staff on the signs and impact of sexual violence, the reporting chain, and the legal framework. In several missions, MEP priests are involved in diocesan committees dealing with allegations of sexual violence. However, the commitment of MEP priests to safeguarding is very variable in mission countries and there are inequalities in the way priests act on their commitments.

During the interviews, the auditors noted that the understanding, perception and attitudes towards safeguarding vary greatly from one priest and one country to another. This is sometimes expressed by a difference in support or even the minimisation of safeguarding concerns. Some priests initially refused to have an interview with the audit team on the grounds that safeguarding was not a concern for them and that it was an issue that they did not have to deal with in their country of mission. There is also a strong reluctance to discuss these issues with the communities, usually due to a lack of capacity and tools.

Finding 5: Many priests spontaneously associate sexual violence with paedocriminality and homosexuality, while the risks of sexual violence against vulnerable adults and the risks of heterosexual violence and sexual exploitation are rarely mentioned. Sexual relations between a priest and a woman are frowned upon as being in breach of chastity and priestly celibacy, but despite the recognised status and authority of priests¹⁹ and the significant power differential, a woman's consent is rarely questioned (even in the case of pregnancy and subsequent abandonment of the mother and child by the priest). At the same time, allegations of sexual violence against a man provoke strong reactions, sometimes tinged with homophobia. During interviews with MEP priests, it was sometimes suggested that homosexuality, unlike heterosexuality, is automatically active in men, or that it is more likely to target minors (although scientific research disproves this assertion). Several MEP priests did not hesitate to say that there would be no problems of sexual violence within the MEP if there were no homosexual priests, or that homosexuals should not be priests in the first place. Although the harshest comments against homosexuals were made by only a few priests, references to people's sexual orientation as a risk factor for sexual violence or condemnation of homosexuality were more frequent. The issue of sexual orientation seems to take precedence over that of consent and the abuse of power inherent in sexual violence, especially when it involves a priest.

¹⁹ "in persona Christi". <https://www.la-croix.com/Definitions/Lexique/Quand-parle-pretre-veut-dire-persona-Christi-2021-12-01-1701187879>

1.2. Governance structures evolving to meet safeguarding needs

The MEP Society elects a permanent council of 5 members every 6 years: a superior general, a vicar general, a secretary general and two other members. In MEP mission countries, group leaders are responsible for overseeing MEP activities in each country or region (some groups include several countries). The group leaders are elected and form part of the plenary council. The monitoring of the various mission countries is divided between the members of the Permanent Council.

Finding 1: Since March 2024, reported cases have no longer been managed by the Superior General but by a General Delegate for Protection and an Evaluation Council with 5 members. These are the delegate general for protection, his deputy and three lay experts from outside the MEP: one woman, a moralist theologian, and two men with professional experience in justice and the police. According to the MEP Protection Delegate's roadmap, reported allegations may be investigated at a strategic meeting by an Investigation Officer (IO).

Finding 2: The Chief Protection Officer is currently a member of the Board. He assumes this role in addition to his other responsibilities. This role is therefore part-time. The Board has developed a roadmap for the Chief Protection Officers, including case management and steering of the MEP prevention policy.

Finding 3: There has been no clear communication on the role, operation and members of the Evaluation Council, nor on the responsibilities of the Chief Executive Officer and the Local Protection Officers. These new entities are also not mentioned in the MEP charter, nor in the incident management procedures described in its appendices.

Finding 4: The MEP Constitutions (set of rules governing the MEP Society) and the contracts which bind MEP priests to the Society at the time of their appointment, do not indicate any specific responsibilities in terms of combating sexual violence or promoting safeguarding for the members of the Permanent Council and the Regional Superiors.

Finding 5: Group managers currently have no specific responsibilities or resources dedicated to safeguarding. They do not have a roadmap or measurable performance objectives. Discussions with them show that there have been no specific meetings or sessions dedicated to the issue of sexual violence or the charter at regional group meetings. It would appear that these subjects are considered to be the responsibility of the Permanent Council. The audit found that some group leaders are not aware of the safeguarding framework in place in the mission dioceses, even in countries where there have been allegations of sexual violence against MEP priests or volunteers.

1.3. Expectations in terms of behaviour and adherence to safeguarding reflected in the charter

Finding 1: Since 2016, MEP has adopted a charter of ethics for pastoral conduct (the charter). This is the only safeguarding policy that the auditors identified. The recent development of such a tool has filled a clear gap in terms of safeguarding.²⁰

The charter applies to priests, deacons, seminarians, lay volunteers and any person on a pastoral mission with the MEP Society. It does not apply to salaried employees or volunteers who are not involved in a pastoral mission.

Finding 2: The charter was sent to all priests by email in 2021. According to the interviews, the vast majority have read it at least once. The priests are all aware of its existence. The auditors were able to observe the paper version in many offices.

Finding 3: At the annual formation meeting for young missionaries in Thailand in February 2023, the Superior General and his vicar led a specific session of around 2-3 hours on safeguarding and the charter. This is the only safeguarding initiative that relates specifically to the charter that the audit documented. The Permanent Council had requested that each mission group work on the charter, but there was no formal follow-up to this potential work. According to the Board, "the charter has not penetrated".

Recommendations

1. Draw up a comprehensive safeguarding plan that includes prevention and case management, and allocate the material, human and financial resources needed for its implementation.
2. Review the charter and draw up a specific policy for MEP employees.
3. Strengthen the human resources dedicated to safeguarding by recruiting a full-time safeguarding officer to support the Chief Protection Officer and by identifying local protection officers in each mission group or country.
4. Update and expand the page dedicated to the fight against abuse on the MEP website, with information on the role of the Chief Protection Officer, the Case Management Unit and the Assessment Unit, and key safeguarding tools.

²⁰<https://missionsetrangeres.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Charte-de-deontologie-de-conduite-pastorale-MEP-version-2-nov-2020.pdf>

2. Insufficient resources and practices to create safe environments

2.1. Risks that should be systematically assessed and taken into account when implementing activities

Finding 1: Setting up a system to prevent violence against minors and vulnerable adults requires knowledge of the risks of sexual violence to which they are exposed. The auditors did not find any documents listing the risks within each parish, structure or project managed by the MEP, nor any plan detailing the measures put in place to reduce these risks. There is therefore no systematic approach to assessing and documenting risks in the contexts in which MEP priests, volunteers and employees operate.

Finding 2: The auditors observed that some of these risks were fully taken into account, while others were not perceived. In the mission countries, examples of risk reduction measures were noted. These measures are sometimes the result of diocesan standards, for example for confessions, or the installation of glass on office doors. Some priests have also been made aware of safeguarding during their careers. Spontaneously for some, following a request from the diocese for others, priests have got into the habit of only meeting a person face to face if the room or door has a window, and do not receive people alone in their accommodation. MEP priests have also taken initiatives, sometimes with limited budgets, to reorganise space in the parishes or buildings for which they are responsible, in order to separate different activities and create a safer environment. In some building projects, the layout of rooms, toilets and dormitories is discussed with a view to limiting the risk of violence. These initiatives are positive and demonstrate that risks are understood and taken into account.

Not all risks are fully analysed and some are not sufficiently taken into account in the implementation of activities. The projects managed by MEP priests often support vulnerable people (ethnic minorities, homeless people, drug users, orphans or children separated from their parents, people with disabilities, etc.). Some parishes are attached to a school or kindergarten. Others host boarding schools. There are also practices whereby parishioners sleep on the premises, for example during adoration. In some mission countries, there is no other option but to host people in their own homes. The risks associated with these situations are not necessarily identified and projects can be implemented while blind spots remain in terms of safeguarding.

Finding 3: Not all venues managed by MEP are governed by clear and precise regulations, mentioning measures to prevent sexual violence and setting out everyone's obligations in this area.

At the MEP house on rue du Bac in Paris, rules apply to everyone staying there, whether they are long-term residents or just passing through. They are printed on an A4 sheet in each room. They are very brief and do not constitute internal rules reflecting the expected requirements in terms of safeguarding.

The residents of rue du Bac are housed in different buildings or on different floors depending on their profile/status (male or female, priest or lay person, etc.). The

bedrooms and various rooms in each building are equipped with locks, and residents have access badges to control the comings and goings of residents and any visitors. There are also cameras in the corridors and communal areas. These various measures help to guarantee a good level of security in the rue du Bac premises.

In mission countries, the situation is similar for MEP buildings or buildings where MEP priests work and organise activities: certain risk reduction measures are in place but the approach is not systematic or documented. In some MEP houses, a document outlining a few rules for living together, of a more practical nature, is made available to residents. Parishes staffed by MEP priests do not usually seem to have written rules for users, but in practice rules are often communicated orally.

Finding 4: The wifi system used in the MEP building enables the IT manager to detect the consultation of websites with illegal content (child pornography photos and videos, for example) by the building's occupants. If illegal sites are consulted, the IT manager reports the matter to MEP.

As far as mission parishes are concerned, not all dioceses seem to have developed specific procedures or practices governing the use of the Internet or social networks.

Finding 5: Data management is not governed by sufficiently rigorous procedures and practices. The photos and videos that may be taken as part of parish activities or projects are not governed by precise rules. During the visits, the auditors noted that the consent of each person was not systematically obtained prior to each photo or video and there does not appear to be any procedure.

Priests involved in managing reports of alleged sexual violence do not take sufficient precautions to protect information about these allegations and the people involved (password protecting documents, especially when shared by email, printing only when necessary).

Finding 6: Collaborations between MEP and third parties are not always the subject of a contract, and when there is a contract it does not systematically include safeguarding clauses.

The staff of sub-contracting companies working for the MEP, whether in France or in a mission country, working in parishes or MEP houses, such as maintenance, security or cleaning staff, are not familiar with the safeguarding framework governing the MEP. They receive no training or presentation of the MEP charter, the behaviour expected of them, MEP priests and pastoral workers, or the reporting channels available. This is all the more important when subcontractors work in homes or buildings where vulnerable people are housed.

Finding 7: The documentation of the most recent allegations of sexual violence shows that when a priest is implicated for sexual violence and is the subject of a police investigation, the MEP apply measures aimed at reducing the risks, including a ban on continuing a ministry or taking part in public events within the parish. These practices are not systematically applied to everyone who is the subject of an internal investigation today. For those individuals who are the subject of an internal investigation but do not

require reporting to the authorities, it is nevertheless necessary to carry out a risk assessment and apply precautionary measures on the basis of this assessment.

2.2. The need for appropriate policies and procedures

Finding 1: The Constitutions of the MEP, in relation to the obligations of canon law to which they refer, include directives on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, emphasising the importance of human dignity, respect for the rights of each person, and the responsibility of missionaries in preventing abuse and protecting the most vulnerable in their missions. The Constitutions provide for disciplinary measures and dismissal, with reference to articles of canon law²¹, in particular if a MEP priest forces someone by threats, violence or abuse of authority to perform or undergo sexual acts, any relationship with minors²² or vulnerable persons, real or simulated pornographic exhibitions and the fact of divulging pornographic images in any way whatsoever, acquired in an immoral manner, of minors or adults, and provide for sanctions in accordance with canon law.

Finding 2: The MEP Charter is for the attention of priests, deacons, seminarians, lay volunteers and all persons on pastoral mission with the Society of the MEP" including pastoral agents and volunteers" who have the duty (...) to know the limits imposed by the moral, civil, canonical and pastoral codes of the MEP". The charter establishes standards for the protection of individuals, the management of abuse, and the ongoing training of members to ensure ethics and good conduct within the society. It establishes procedures for reporting and managing incidents, encourages MEP priests to report concerns confidentially and promotes transparency in the handling of incidents and complaints. It provides for regular training of MEP members on inappropriate behaviour, signs of abuse and reporting procedures. In this way, it encourages the creation of an anti-abuse culture. This policy is aligned with the safeguarding standards defined by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

Finding 3: The charter is accessible from the MEP website. It is only available in French and the way in which it is written is complex, which means that it is not accessible to everyone concerned.

The charter does not apply to MEP staff and there is no safeguarding policy for MEP employees.

Finding 4: There is no safeguarding plan within the MEP that lists the actions to be taken and assigns responsibilities to different people for implementing them. Safeguarding at the MEP is focused on managing allegations, even though there are a few prevention initiatives. There is no holistic vision of safeguarding at the moment.

MEP do not have procedures that spell out the rules to be followed in all areas of safeguarding: recruitment, induction, training, monitoring, whistleblowing mechanisms, whistleblower management, internal investigations, etc.

Finding 5: In mission countries, MEP priests must also comply with diocesan safeguarding policies and procedures. In some countries, these documents are available,

²¹ See Constitution, Leaving the Society, C17, page 9 and canons 1395, 1397, 1398 of the CIC/1983.

²² According to Canon Law, C. 97 CIC/1983 §1 "At the age of eighteen, a person is of full age; below that age, he is a minor".

but this is not always the case. There are therefore two systems that apply simultaneously. In recent years, some reports concerning MEP priests have been made to the diocese and dealt with by the diocese, while others have been made to the MEP in France. There is no clear procedure for reporting allegations concerning an MEP priest, which can create confusion and lead to different practices from one situation to another.

Finding 6: There is no involvement of the people concerned in the development of the MEP safeguarding tools. The charter was not developed with the participation of priests, community members or victims of sexual violence.

Most dioceses with safeguarding systems have introduced policies and procedures without consulting the communities or the victims of sexual violence. These are standard documents and their use is still relatively recent.

Recommendations

1. Make an inventory of safeguarding risks in each parish, site, project or activity managed by the MEP, with a view to drawing up and implementing a plan to reduce the risks identified. Systematically assess the risks associated with the continuation of the ministry of a priest implicated for acts of violence and put in place measures to mitigate these risks.
2. Equip each MEP building that accommodates people or receives people during the day with internal rules that reflect the MEP's requirements in terms of combating sexual violence and displaying it.
3. To develop IT and technological procedures concerning the use of computers, the internet, social networks, the management and protection of personal data, photos and videos taken as part of MEP activities, and to train all staff, volunteers and priests.
4. Develop and make available procedures for applying the MEP safeguarding policy in each area of action: recruitment, training, monitoring, reporting management, projects and activities, communication and funding.

3. Increasingly rigorous alert management

3.1. Means of communicating alerts and complaints that are not accessible and known to all

Finding 1: In recent years, the MEP Council has put in place ways of reporting sexual violence in society and has reminded people of the communication channels dedicated to reporting. Volunteers, priests and employees know who they should contact if they witness or are victims of violence: volunteers are instructed to inform their volunteer service referent, while priests and employees should contact their superior.

The MEP website also has an e-mail address dedicated to reports²³. This e-mail address has been mentioned in various MEP communications in recent months. These communications have also sometimes been relayed by the press. Several reports were received via this email during the audit and forwarded to the auditors.

As part of the audit, a specific email was created by GCPS, providing a direct channel with the audit team. Some reports or requests for interviews with the auditors were received via this channel.

The Board asked the auditors to visit the mission countries where this was possible, in order to increase the chances of reporting incidents and to evaluate the reporting channels available and the relevance of setting up hotlines. Finally, a call for testimonies has been translated into the languages of the mission countries and disseminated in the mission countries of the MEP priests. These measures are significant, but many barriers to reporting remain. The fact that the 'call for testimonies' did not give rise to any reports from the mission countries clearly demonstrates this.

Finding 2: In the mission countries, the means made available by the MEP for reporting behaviour are limited. There are no channels accessible to people who do not have a smartphone or computer, no channels accessible to those who cannot read or write, and no channels accessible to children.

In some parishes, people wishing to report something have the reflex of consulting the local church website to obtain the dedicated e-mail address for alerts, whereas for certain groups access or even mastery of the Internet may be limited. This is particularly the case for vulnerable groups: ethnic minorities, children, homeless people, people with mental disabilities or addictions, or anyone with less financial, legal or social power. These groups are often the most vulnerable to violence.

During the visits to the various mission countries, the auditors tried to assess which reporting channels would be best suited to each context. There is no single solution adapted to all the regions where MEP priests work; each region has different problems.

Finding 3: Among the obstacles to reporting, the auditors noted a lack of knowledge of policies and procedures on the part of people who might be called upon to report behaviour. To date, there is no reporting policy or case management policy specific to MEP. The society refers to the Pontifical Norms (VELM and Vademecum) and the steps for managing "serious and worrying information about abuse involving a member of the MEP",

²³ sos-protection@missionsetrangeres.com

CORREF procedures²⁴ and CEF²⁵. The audit team summarises the reporting and incident management process in appendix 2.

The very possibility of reporting behaviour is not necessarily known. There is virtually no communication about existing whistleblowing mechanisms or about the rights of individuals or behaviour that contravenes safeguarding policies and procedures. Even if people knew what they could report and how to report it, they had no access to information about how it would be handled.

Finding 4: In the various mission dioceses, the local church has not systematically set up a warning mechanism. What exists is very uneven. Some dioceses have a dedicated email address and a committee appointed to receive and deal with alerts, while others provide an email address that is not specific to reporting abuse. In some mission countries there is virtually nothing (no committee, no reporting mechanism).

In some countries where procedures have been put in place and resources allocated, interviews with members of the bishopric have shown that there are sometimes very few complaints, fewer than 10 in several years for example, for very large parishes, which indicates that the mechanism is not working properly. The absence of reporting does not mean that there are no incidents worthy of reporting. It is rather an indicator of the fact that the mechanism is not known or does not inspire confidence.

Finding 5: The audit also noted some very interesting examples where reporting arrangements are built into diocesan employee contracts. MEP priests have even been involved in the development of these procedures and policies and in staff training, which is excellent practice.

3.2. Greater safeguarding expertise is needed to strengthen the handling of alerts

Finding 1: At present, all reports received by the Permanent Council or the Case Management Unit are recorded in a database.

As far as incidents taking place in mission parishes are concerned, reports are normally first made to the local church, which records and processes these alerts. When the person in question is an MEP priest, the local church informs the group leader or the general superior.

Finding 2: The documentation of recent cases to which the auditors had access indicates that the permanent board is rigorous. Each file contains a large number of documents relating to the allegations and the communications associated with the management of the case. However, despite the presence of numerous documents documenting the allegations, a document presenting a factual description and an analysis of the allegation(s) is missing for each case.

The audit also notes that recent reports have been investigated internally when it was deemed necessary to gather more information to qualify and confirm the facts.

²⁴ Conference of Religious of France

²⁵ French Bishops' Conference

However, it is difficult to determine the duration of MEP case management. Some cases are the subject of police investigations and legal proceedings that are still ongoing, while internal MEP investigations sometimes extend over long periods.

Finding 3: Concerning the handling of reports via internal processes, the MEP restricts communication. It is essential to respect the confidentiality of all parties involved in these processes, but a certain level of transparency is necessary with regard to the people who have made the report and with regard to the victims and witnesses involved. The auditors noted that there were sometimes misunderstandings and even frustrations surrounding the processes for handling reports. The fact that there is very little communication is interpreted as a certain inertia on the part of the MEP, even though initiatives have more often than not been taken. If the people making a report have the impression that it is pointless or will not succeed, confidence in the reporting mechanism is altered. The local church also needs to be informed and even involved in decisions. The bishop of the mission diocese of an MEP priest implicated in the past said that he would like to be informed of decisions before the priests are sent back to France, and to be better informed of the procedure in France so that he can respond to questions from parishioners. It would appear that this lack of communication is no longer a problem; the Superior General of the MEP communicates with the bishop concerned.

Finding 4: The auditors were able to consult reports of internal investigations conducted by the MEP. These investigations were carried out in a confidential and detailed manner and were the subject of a rigorous report, shared with the Council and then with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Nevertheless, they were carried out by an MEP priest who knew the protagonists in some cases, which indicates a conflict of interest. Furthermore, this priest was not trained to conduct safeguarding investigations. This is not in contradiction with Vademecum 2.0 and Vos Estis Lux Mundi, 2019 which stipulate that the Superior General may call upon the person or institution of his choice, but the conduct of such investigations requires specific expertise. The investigations were not conducted in pairs and the MEP did not call on external experts. It should be noted that in two cases, the Superior General and the Permanent Council requested that the investigations be carried out by the National Canonical Criminal Court in order to ensure greater objectivity.

Finding 5: The identification of a Chief Protection Officer and the creation of an Evaluation Committee are important steps forward. This increases the capacity of the Permanent Council and clarifies roles. However, the members of the Evaluation Committee do not necessarily all have expertise or a common understanding of safeguarding. The auditors noted that they would be undertaking extensive training on sexual violence from October 2024. No training is planned to date on receiving reports, supporting victims, conducting investigations and other technical aspects that require practice in order to acquire the required expertise.

Finding 6: The Superior General has reported several incidents to the public prosecutor since 2021. These reports were made within a relatively short period of time following receipt of information about the incidents and were most often the subject of a communication from the Permanent Council.

Only one report to the French authorities was made by the Superior General of the MEP before 2021. It did not concern a priest.

With regard to the allegations identified by the auditors, it does not appear that any reports have been made to the civil authorities of the countries where the cases of abuse were allegedly committed.

3.3. An approach that focuses more on victims/survivors

Finding 1: In some of the MEP priests' mission parishes, other missionary and religious societies are present. In particular, there are sisters who sometimes have specific expertise in trauma care and psychosocial support. They offer support to vulnerable people, including victims of abuse.

Some mission dioceses are also very active and work with organisations specialising in protection. MEP priests can then benefit from valuable support if they identify a victim of violence or a risk of violence. Some MEP priests have detected and managed cases of violence within the community in coordination with the safeguarding unit set up in their mission diocese. Projects run by MEP priests also have a significant "protection" component from which vulnerable people benefit.

Finding 2: Over time, some MEP priests have developed a network or a map of actors within their area of action, including local organisations or United Nations agencies offering, through their protection programmes, expertise and potential resources that are interesting and complementary to MEP capacities. MEP priests are not always in a position to respond to the needs expressed by victims of sexual violence. This is why mapping and collaboration with specialised local actors is necessary in each diocese or mission country. Not all MEP priests are familiar with local organisations that can provide support to victims of sexual violence.

The mechanisms established in the mission dioceses vary from one diocese to another and from one country to another. They are not always very responsive, according to MEP priests who have had to deal with cases of sexual violence within the community, and the MEP permanent council in Paris is not organised to provide remote support to a priest in dealing with a case in his diocese.

MEP priests can sometimes find themselves somewhat alone and powerless when faced with a complex situation. The standards of assistance and protection for the victim may be affected and vary from case to case depending on the capacities of the diocese, those of the MEP priest or the resources available. For example, it is possible that a community member accused of sexual violence was able to remain in contact with his child victim because no protective measures had been taken to protect the victim.

Finding 3: A review of the documentation concerning the management of recent cases within the MEP shows that insufficient efforts are still being made to listen to and support victims. Their support essentially takes the form of pastoral support combined with communication with the system set up by the church in France²⁶ or the local church.

²⁶ For example, the victims' helplines and the independent body for compensation of victims, known as the "Instance nationale indépendante de reconnaissance et de réparation (INIRR)".

Victims' rights, needs and wishes are not systematically assessed, in contravention of safeguarding standards²⁷ which advocate a "victim-centred" approach.

The position adopted by the MEP with regard to victims is sometimes even problematic when there is a reluctance to recognise a person's status as a victim until the legal proceedings have confirmed this. The MEP Council has expressed discomfort with using a victim/survivor-centred approach because it is perceived as calling into question the presumption of innocence of the priests involved. In the case of a deceased priest, it seems more obvious for the MEP to consider a person who presents himself as a victim, whereas in the case of a living priest, the attitude adopted is more protective of the priest, which is understandable, but sometimes to the detriment of giving the victim a proper voice and support. The victim-centred approach requires unconditional support for a person who identifies him/herself as a victim, whatever the situation from a legal point of view, but it does not replace the presumption of innocence. When the MEP do not recognise the victim status of someone who claims to be a victim, that person suffers additional violence. Furthermore, the care and support provided to victims is governed by guiding principles²⁸ and must begin as soon as a complaint is received, in accordance with accepted standards in this field.²⁹

In addition to meeting the needs of identified victims, the question of finding other victims arises. The practice of the MEP, including during field investigations, is to encourage other potential victims to testify through the channels made available, without carrying out a proactive search on the grounds as this could endanger the victims or re-traumatise them. The 'call for testimonies' is an example of this strategy. However, the low number of direct reports from victims highlights the need to offer more ways of reporting, to establish confidence in these ways and to initiate conversations about what is and is not acceptable from a priest, for example. Following certain allegations, steps have been taken to inform people of the MEP's willingness to support other possible victims, but these initiatives are insufficient in view of the known allegations.

Finding 4: The Church has set up care systems in France and in some countries where MEP priests are based, but not all. These arrangements vary in effectiveness from one diocese to another.

The mission dioceses do not seem to have discussed these procedures in detail at meetings of the presbyterate. Yet it is a requirement of Rome to have set up a reporting office for each diocese, and legal protocols promulgated by bishop's decree. Nor have there been any exchanges between the dioceses and the MEP group leader to clarify roles and responsibilities or to present the diocese's expectations in terms of care standards. MEP priests seem to be made aware of the arrangements when cases arise. In cases where there is no diocesan scheme, or where it is insufficient or little known, MEP priests are not proactive in seeking information, suggesting improvements or demanding that something be put in place.

²⁷ Note, for example, the UN resolution on assistance to victims, December 2007.

²⁸ In the humanitarian field, assistance to victims is based on major principles reflected in the policies and procedures of each organisation and described in reference documents such as this one: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-06/IASC%20Definition%20%26%20Principles%20of%20a%20Victim_Survivor%20Centered%20Approach.pdf

²⁹ See, for example, the United Nations Uniform Protocol on Victim Assistance, 2017.

Finding 5: Some MEP priests sometimes rely on the expertise of local associations to organise sessions on the prevention of sexual violence for specific groups (such as minors living in boarding schools run by the MEP) or on domestic violence in the context of marriage counselling. However, these initiatives depend on the sensitivity of the MEP priest and in the vast majority of parishes there is no communication on the prevention of sexual violence. The audit team did not see in any mission parishes, communication or information materials explaining to parishioners the care they can receive if they are victims of sexual violence.

Finding 6: Information given to parishioners on the functioning and governance of the church body in the vast majority of mission parishes is inadequate. The audit team did not see any communication media on these aspects of governance and accountability in the mission parishes.

It is also difficult for a parishioner or even an MEP priest to understand, when a case of sexual violence is reported, which measures are the responsibility of the MEP, the local church or any safeguarding committee that may have been set up.

Group leaders are not always aware of the safeguarding structure and procedures in place in each diocese in the country or countries under their supervision. MEP priests sometimes discover this when a case arises. Case management varies from one situation to another as it is often reactive due to the lack of communication and clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each in safeguarding.

Finding 7: In the mission parishes of the MEP priests, the communities are rarely consulted on the setting up of alert mechanisms or on how best to prevent and respond to cases of sexual violence. Apart from the systems implemented by the dioceses, the audit team did not find any safeguarding mechanisms specific to a mission parish or project, developed in consultation with the people concerned.

Recommendations

1. Develop and communicate a whistleblowing policy and an incident management procedure to all those likely to make a report (volunteers, salaried staff, volunteers, priests and student priests).
2. Clarify, in a document to be made available to all, the division of roles between the MEP and the diocese of mission, at each stage in the management of an allegation.
3. In consultation with communities, set up reporting systems in mission parishes or strengthen and promote existing ones, taking care to ensure that they are accessible to all.
4. Build the capacity of members of the permanent council, the case management unit and group leaders in incident management and victim care.
5. Use external investigators to conduct investigations and train society members and MEP employees to conduct investigations.

6. Draw up and update a detailed map of local organisations and services specialising in protection that can provide assistance to victims and support incident management.
7. Inform and sensitise the communities in each mission parish about the safeguarding mechanisms in place, the rights of victims of sexual violence in terms of care and the distribution of roles between the MEP and/or the diocese in the management of an incident.

4. Insufficient safeguarding training

4.1. A commitment to safeguarding that must be clear from the very first stages of recruitment

Finding 1: People who want to join the MEP as priests, employees or volunteers can access the charter on the MEP website. However, the information on the MEP safeguarding procedures and the society's "zero tolerance" approach on the MEP website and the volunteer service³⁰ is still limited. For example, there is no mention of the safeguarding commitment on the "discern my vocation" page. Furthermore, recruitment advertisements and job descriptions do not systematically mention this commitment.

Finding 2: Recruitment practices designed to assess candidates' level of knowledge of, commitment to or support for safeguarding are not uniform across the various MEP departments. For example, candidates are not systematically asked questions on these subjects during interviews or recruitment tests.

Finding 3: References are not taken systematically when selecting future volunteers, seminarians or MEP priests. Nor is it done when recruiting staff. For volunteers, it is limited to contacting the two people indicated by the candidate. The MEP partner for International Solidarity Volunteers (VSI) requires a criminal record, whereas this is not required for VMS volunteers. For seminary candidates, letters of recommendation are requested from family, personal and ecclesiastical sources. Professional references are not taken if the seminary candidate has had professional experience.

Finding 4: The obligations of each party in terms of safeguarding are not specified in the volunteer contracts and agreements. The VMS volunteer contract clearly mentions the MEP charter and reporting channels. This is not the case in the contracts of priests and employees, and the VSI agreement between the MEP volunteer and the Guild does not indicate any obligations in terms of safeguarding, nor does it mention the obligation to sign the MEP charter.

For all these people, there is no mention that failure to comply with the safeguarding policy can lead to sanctions or breach of contract or agreement.

Finding 5: The level of information provided to priests and volunteers before their deployment or on their arrival is inadequate. For volunteers, the information dedicated to the prevention of sexual violence in the volunteer handbook is very brief. It consists of a link to the MEP charter and reporting email addresses. The guide includes a flyer listing some definitions and what to do if the volunteer is a witness, victim or perpetrator. There is no information on how a report is handled or by whom. Priests do not receive (or sign) the Safeguarding policies and procedures for their diocese of mission before leaving on mission. Interviews with volunteers and priests in the field confirmed this impression by the little knowledge that the former generally have of the reporting and incident management system within the MEP and that the latter have of the Safeguarding system set up by the diocese.

³⁰ <https://volontairemep.com/quand-partir/>

Finding 6: MEP volunteers act on behalf of MEP and are perceived as such by people. However, even if they sign terms of reference detailing their tasks and obligations in certain cases, this is not systematic. Nor do they systematically sign the charter when they have a pastoral activity, whether in France or in a mission country.

Finding 7: In some dioceses, pastoral workers, catechists and other people recruited who come into contact with minors as a result of their activities are required to sign a specific declaration in which they undertake not to behave inappropriately. In this way, parishes recognise the risks associated with employing these people, but the declaration alone is insufficient to reduce these risks.

4.2. Initial and ongoing safeguarding training for anyone recruited by MEP to be put in place

While noting the lack of a system within the MEP to track the number of priests, staff or volunteers who have received initial and ongoing safeguarding training, and the absence of an overall training plan adapted to each mission country, the audit team noted the following initiatives and findings.

Finding 1: The propaedeutic (or discernment) year includes sessions on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons, as well as on the prevention of sexual violence. The spiritual directors, who accompany the seminarians, receive training in the prevention and management of abuse. During interviews, the audit team found that MEP priests who are spiritual directors have a solid understanding and experience of safeguarding. It seems, however, that this is often linked to their personal background rather than to a system in place within the MEP. Seminarians, for their part, are trained in the church's policies on preventing sexual abuse, in respecting ethical standards, and in creating safe environments for all, especially children and vulnerable people.

Finding 2: The audit identified few initiatives aimed at training MEP priests, volunteers and employees in the MEP safeguarding "policy" and its procedures. The audit notes a safeguarding training course given in 2016 at the MEP house, incident management training for permanent council members in March 2024 (by the audit team) and online training in October 2024, facilitated by a missionary priest specialising in safeguarding. There are no specific MEP awareness or training modules or mandatory safeguarding training for all priests.

On the other hand, we note that the mission dioceses organise training for diocesan priests and that this training is sometimes compulsory. In one diocese, priests received training on the diocese's policy for the protection of minors. MEP priests have also been active in supporting their dioceses in developing training materials and organising training to support staff in responding effectively to risks and concerns of abuse. One MEP priest was able to contribute to the training of all staff in his diocese on abuse issues, signs and reporting of abuse, etc.

Finding 3: As far as volunteers are concerned, the week-long pre-departure training course includes a 30-minute session on safeguarding issues. This is far from enough. On site, volunteers do not receive any specific induction on safeguarding, according to the interviews carried out. For example, a volunteer working in a care centre for children living with disabilities did not meet her MEP manager during the first few months of her voluntary service, nor did she receive any training in the safeguarding policy of the organisation she was working for.

4.3. Support for MEP priests, volunteers and employees, including particular attention to safeguarding.

Finding 1: There are opportunities to support priests, employees and volunteers. Priests have regular discussions with their group leader and at group meetings. MEP employees in Paris have annual individual meetings with their managers. Volunteers have regular contact, every month if they wish, with their focal point in the volunteer service. There is no practice of asking safeguarding questions on a regular basis, such as "Have you been the victim of or witnessed any behaviour that is in breach of MEP rules or that has made you feel uncomfortable during this last period?"

Finding 2: Monitoring of MEP priests by the group manager is not as systematic or regular as that of employees, and depends on the group manager. Priests and seminarians do not have annual appraisal interviews like employees.

Over and above safeguarding, the issues surrounding support for priests are important, and the question of priests' mental health was raised in many interviews. Some situations in which a priest encounters difficulties are detected by the group leader or the council, while others require the priest to clearly express a request, which is not always obvious.

Finding 3: MEP priests benefit from diocesan safeguarding initiatives. For example, all the priests in one mission visited received training on the local church's policy for the protection of minors. However, in cases where such training was not compulsory, MEP priests did not necessarily attend.

4.4. Support for MEP staff to detect and respond effectively to reports and identify risk factors that may contribute to abuse

Finding 1: Several board members have received training on sexual violence in recent years. However, only two members of the case management team received short training on case management in March 2024. Online training was organised for all priests in September 2024 and was very positively received. Any team leader, priest, employee, volunteer or volunteer may witness sexual violence and has a duty to report under the charter and there is no systematic basic training for all of these people.

Finding 2: The interviews conducted by the auditors and the analysis of the reports received by the MEP highlighted shortcomings in the identification of certain mechanisms of violence. The question of control and consent, for example, is often poorly assessed. In cases where a priest has had a sexual relationship with a woman, even a much younger

one, questions are rarely asked about the power differential between the priest and the young woman or about the fact that the latter may be dependent on the parish (either through a job or a service, or even spiritually). These factors can lead to a dynamic of sexual exploitation³¹ in which the woman is not really in a position to refuse sexual relations if they are requested for fear of losing a job, assistance or spiritual help, for example. These relationships always seem to be considered to be consensual: in none of the files reviewed were they questioned.

Finding 3: Student priests are hosted by the MEP for long periods. Their applications are sent by their bishop, who vouches for them. Their application includes a document certifying that their record is clean and that they have not committed any sexual offences. They do not receive any training from the MEP on their arrival on safeguarding practices and the reporting protocol in place within the MEP society.

Recommendations

1. Include information on MEP's zero tolerance policy towards sexual violence in all recruitment materials.
2. Include safeguarding responsibilities in each job description and an assessment of the level of contact with minors and other vulnerable persons for each job.
3. During recruitment interviews, assess candidates' values, knowledge and attitudes to safeguarding through questions and practical examples.
4. Request an extract from the criminal record (where possible).
5. Systematically take up references for all recruitment and selection processes. Do not limit yourself to contacts given by candidates, and contact previous employers via the human resources department.
6. Set up regular monitoring interviews where this is not provided for, particularly for priests, and include safeguarding issues in these monitoring routines and in performance assessment tools.
7. Set up a half-day training course on safeguarding for all current staff and any new recruits, using interactive facilitation methods and practical case studies.
8. Introduce more in-depth training for employees and priests with additional safeguarding responsibilities that may lead them to train staff themselves or manage incidents.
9. Produce educational and communication materials on safeguarding and adapt them to the different countries where we work.
10. Keep a global and country-by-country register of the number of priests, employees, volunteers and volunteers trained in safeguarding and ensure that all have received basic training.

³¹ See the definition of sexual exploitation in the glossary at the beginning of this report.

5. Communities more involved in the safeguarding approach

5.1. Safeguarding rules that must be adapted to all contexts

Finding 1: The MEP has a single *Protocol in the event of sexual abuse committed by a cleric or a lay person in the context of an ecclesiastical mission*" in the form of an appendix to its charter. It refers to French law, gives contacts for the civil authorities in France and mentions the role of the Superior General and the Council. It is adapted to the context of diocesan parishes in France and refers to the listening cells set up by the Church of France. It is not relevant to the very varied reality of the different mission dioceses, nor harmonised with the reporting procedures put in place by the bishoprics.

Finding 2: There are very few, if any, adapted communication materials specifically for safeguarding in some parishes. The audit team noted few discussions or events with parishioners or beneficiaries of projects managed by the MEP on safeguarding issues, even when the people benefiting from MEP services are particularly vulnerable.

5.2. Communities need to be more consulted on safeguarding issues

Finding 1: Apart from a few small-scale initiatives³², MEP priests do not seem to have set up any specific activities or programmes to support families and the community in strengthening their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. The auditors spoke to many priests and most of them do not feel sufficiently comfortable or trained to tackle these subjects calmly and wisely. Some of them feel that it is not their responsibility but that of the diocese.

Finding 2: During the visit to the parishes, the audit team found very little communication on the issue of safeguarding, either at the initiative of the local church or that of the MEP priests. There are also few mechanisms in place to obtain feedback from families and communities, for example on the effectiveness and accessibility of reporting facilities. Furthermore, the safeguarding protocol does not reflect the situation in the missions and the barriers to reporting that are specific to each context. For example, it does not include reporting channels identified by and set up with communities.

Finding 3: Members of the community are still not sufficiently consulted or informed of the steps taken by the MEP and the local church (which they do not necessarily distinguish) when they wish to report a concern, nor of what they are entitled to expect when they do so.

Finding 4: In general, the auditors did not see, within the communities or groups targeted by the MEP' activities, any focal points responsible for these issues, whose role would be to inform their peers, identify and report to the MEP any risk situations, concerns or even incidents.

³² In one mission country, for example, an MEP priest called on a local organisation to run discussion groups on respect and the issue of domestic violence as part of marriage counselling.

Recommendations:

1. Adapt the Charter protocol to each country or region, taking into account cultural specificities, barriers to reporting, existing protection services, local legislation and the mechanisms established by the dioceses.
2. Identify people in the communities who could act as safeguarding relays and local organisations that could help pass on information and lead discussions.
3. Strengthen the capacity of MEP priests to inform and raise awareness in communities, particularly among children and vulnerable people, and to detect the risks of sexual violence in these local contexts.
4. To carry out and document, in each parish managed by an MEP priest, sexual violence prevention activities adapted to different age groups, contexts and populations, in partnership with the diocese and local organisations specialising in protection.

6. Learning from the reports processed

6.1. An understanding and approach to safeguarding that needs to evolve as a result of the allegations dealt with.

Finding 1: There is no indication in the documentation reviewed by the audit team of a systematic practice aimed at learning lessons from managed cases, or of measures aimed at improving case management standards.

This audit is the first documented consultation, diagnostic and learning exercise on current practices. Practices and complaints management are analysed to identify good practices and potential systemic failures.

The audit has already enabled the Permanent Council to strengthen its safeguarding structure and practice³³ through the creation of a case management unit and more rigorous and precise management of alerts.³⁴

6.2. Concrete recommendations on what can be learned from managing allegations

Finding 1: The Permanent Council members involved in complaints management regularly discuss the cases managed by the unit. They have been able to identify certain shortcomings that explain at least part of the risk situations, but there is no systematic analysis of the conditions that led to the violence.

Finding 2: A case of failure is generally due to a series of shortcomings, such as inadequate recruitment, insufficient training, the absence of monitoring or reporting mechanisms, or negligence on the part of line managers. There is no systematic implementation of corrective measures following the identification of these failures.

Finding 3: The Permanent Council does not share its analysis of the cases dealt with and does not make recommendations to strengthen safeguarding measures with key partners, including the local church.

6.3. Communication of audit findings

Finding 1: Until now, MEP have tended to communicate in a reactive manner in response to events (revelations in the media, legal proceedings, etc.). The Board has decided to publish the audit report in full. This move towards transparency is to be welcomed.

Recommendations

1. Ensuring that the audit recommendations are implemented, which will be set out in a global action plan.

³³ See guideline 1 - Governance and leadership on the creation of the Case Management Unit.

³⁴ See Part B dedicated to the analysis of case management.

2. Schedule a new audit within 3 years of this initial audit, and then every 5 years by an external body, to assess the implementation of the recommendations made in 2024 and the progress made by the MEP in complying with the universal guidelines of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.
3. Analyse the allegations managed by the Assessment Committee, draw lessons from them and implement measures to remedy any shortcomings or failings identified.
4. Communicate regularly on the number of internal alerts handled, their type and the conclusion given to each internal alert.

PART B - INVENTORY OF INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE REPORTED BETWEEN 1950 AND 2024, AND ANALYSIS OF THEIR MANAGEMENT BY THE PARIS FOREIGN MISSIONS SOCIETY

This section focuses on the inventory of incidents of sexual violence involving MEP priests reported between 1950 and 2024. The analysis is based on French law, case management standards drawn from the norms of the Catholic Church³⁵, the MEP Charter and international safeguarding standards³⁶. The auditors took care to refer to the law in force at the time the incident took place in an attempt to qualify the incidents reported from the point of view of criminal law. Analysing these incidents through the prism of safeguarding standards may seem anachronistic given that this safeguarding framework did not exist at the time of the incidents (particularly for incidents that took place between 1950 and 2000). However, from a perspective of learning from past incidents, the auditors considered this framework to be relevant.

The analysis of reported incidents is based on an exhaustive triangulation of various sources, including both documents from the MEP archives and testimonies gathered during interviews during the audit.

The auditors focused their attention on :

- The nature of the incidents reported and the persons implicated ;
- Receipt of the alert ;
- Speed of response;
- Precautionary measures ;
- Internal investigation ;
- Reporting to civil and religious authorities ;
- The measures taken against the accused persons, and
- Support for victims.

It is important to note that the analysis presented in this report relates only to MEP priests, although the audit did identify internal reports of potential sexual violence committed by volunteers on mission linked to the MEP, local clergy or people employed by the MEP in mission dioceses.

³⁵ In particular, Vademecum on some procedural points in dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics, v. 2.0, of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith of 5.06/2020, and the Apostolic Letter in the form of Proprio of the Supreme Pontiff Vos Estis Lux Mundi, 7.05.2019

³⁶ The audit team also examined case management using recognised prevention and response standards, such as the Minimum Operating Procedures developed by the Inter-Agency Committee (IASC) in 2002, which provide clear criteria, as well as the Harmonised UN Agency Tool, developed in 2018, used to assess the capacity of implementing partners. These assessments are based on 8 minimum standards. For surveys, the guidelines and principles developed by the CHS Alliance (Core Humanitarian Standards) are also a reference (see: <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/guidelines-for-investigations/>).

1. The standards to which the MEP society is subject

1.1. Key elements of the Vatican standards used to analyse the management of reported incidents of sexual violence

A review of the documents relating to the reports received shows that the MEP Council applies the norms recommended by the Holy See, especially in recent years, and that its practice has adapted to recent developments in canon law.

In the documentation examined, these normative frameworks are sometimes spelled out and form the basis of the decisions and measures taken by the Superior General and his Council. This is the case, for example, in the case of reported incidents of sexual violence, where reference is made to canons C.307 CIC/1917 or C. 646 CIC/1917³⁷ of the 1917 Code of Canon Law then in force. For incidents after 1983, the documents refer to the canons of the 1983 Code of Canon Law still in force today: C.1394 CIC/1983, C.1395, C.1396 and C.1397.³⁸ For more recent incidents, the Superior General has been able to take measures to suspend the priest in question, in the form of "decrees" based on canon 1722, art 10.2, while the decisions on preliminary investigations, also in the form of decrees, are based on canons 1717 and 1722.

The audit team was able to observe that recent practices of the Council of MEP are more precise and explicit on questions of sexual abuse and that the same is true of developments in canon law. The CIC/1917 does not explicitly use the term "sexual abuse" but speaks of "public scandal" (C.307 §2 for example) whereas the CIC/1983 uses the term "sexual abuse". This trend is reinforced by the apostolic letter in the form of a *Motu Proprio* "Vos Estis Lux Mundi, 2019" and the "Vademecum 2.0, 2020", which define a normative framework and a guide for the advice of MEP in the management of reports that is both useful and binding from the point of view of canon law. A review of the documentation of recently reported incidents of sexual violence, particularly those that have been the subject of media revelations, shows that the MEP board is working to follow their recommendations more precisely and consistently (see later section). *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2019) details the procedures to be followed for reports of offences consisting of "forcing someone, by violence or threat or by abuse of authority, to perform or undergo

³⁷ C. 646 CIC/1917 §1 The following religious are to be considered by right as legitimately dismissed: 1° Those who have publicly apostatized from the Catholic faith. 2° A religious who has absconded with a woman or a religious who has absconded with a man; 3° Those who have made an attempt at marriage or concluded a marriage or simply what is called a civil marriage. §2 In these cases, it is sufficient for the major superior, with his chapter or council, in accordance with the constitutions, to make a declaration of the fact; he must ensure that proof is kept in the registers of the house.

³⁸ C. 1394 CIC/1983 §1 A cleric who awaits marriage, even if only civil, incurs the *suspense latae sententiae*, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 194, § 1, n. 3, and can. 694, § 1, n. 2; if after receiving monition he does not repent or persists in causing scandal, he is to be punished with increasingly severe privations and even dismissal from the clerical state. §2 A religious in perpetual vows who is not a cleric, if he enters into a marriage, even a civil marriage, incurs the *interdictum latae sententiae*, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 694 § 1, n. 2. C. 1395 CIC/1983 §1 A cleric who is a concubine, apart from the case mentioned in can. 1394, and the cleric who persists with scandal in another external fault against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, are to be punished with suspension, and if, after monition, they persist in their offence, other penalties may be gradually added, including dismissal from the clerical state. §2 A cleric who has otherwise committed an offence against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, if indeed the offence was committed publicly, is to be punished with a just penalty, including, if the case so requires, dismissal from the clerical state. §3 With the same penalty as in § 2, a cleric is to be punished who, with violence, threats or abuse of authority, commits an offence against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue or compels someone to perform or undergo sexual acts.

sexual acts, performing sexual acts with a minor or with a vulnerable person or producing, exhibiting, holding or distributing, even by computer, child pornography material, as well as recruiting or inciting a minor or a vulnerable person to take part in pornographic exhibitions". Vademecum 2.0 deals exclusively with "cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics". These two texts consider anyone under the age of 18 to be a minor, as does the MEP Charter.

This analysis is based on the main stages of incident management used in these standards: receiving reports and protecting data, the report itself, protecting the person reporting and taking care of people, particularly victims, the internal investigation, precautionary measures and sanctions.

These texts also specify the deadlines that must be met. There is often mention of transmitting information "without delay" and it is specified that investigations must be concluded "within 90 days".

These texts also mention important concepts such as confidentiality and conflicts of interest, and reiterate the obligation to report and the need to inform the competent Dicastery, most often the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith must provide feedback following the report and may offer advice or even technical support. These texts also lay the foundations for good communication and coordination between the Superior General of the MEP and the representatives of the local church in the management of incidents, since "*the ordinary who has received the report shall forward it without delay to the ordinary where the incident is alleged to have occurred*"³⁹, without however giving a detailed division of roles and responsibilities at each stage, and in particular during the investigation.

1.2. The framework provided by the MEP Pastoral Deontology Charter

The MEP protocol provides a structured and detailed approach to the management of reports in a French context. The procedure is geared towards the protection of victims, witnesses or complainants, immediate reporting, psychological and legal support and discretion in handling complaints of sexual offences, while taking account of both civil and ecclesiastical law.

The charter uses a definition of sexual abuse in line with that of the Motu Proprio "Vos Estis Lux Mundi". Its appendix, "Protocol in the event of abuse", defines sexual offences in general terms as "any form of action related to sexual activity towards or with minors or non-consenting adults", with examples such as "rape, sexual assault, prostitution of minors, touching, corruption of minors, exhibitionism, presentation, consultation of child pornography images and/or pornographic exploitation of the image of minors, etc."

1.3. Important elements of French law used to analyse the management of reported incidents of sexual violence

The mandate given to the audit team was to examine the incidents and situations through the prism of French criminal law. The auditors considered the elements of French law to ascertain whether internal reports received at the time of the events should have been

³⁹ Vos Estis Lux Mundi, 2019

reported to the judicial and religious authorities. Laws concerning sexual offences and crimes of sexual violence have evolved, but sexual offences against minors under the age of 15 have long been criminal offences, and were so during the period covered by the audit.

The audit team did not carry out a detailed analysis of the legal framework of the mission countries in which reported incidents of sexual violence may have occurred, nor of the legal obligations of MEP to report to the civil authorities of these countries. However, in the majority of mission countries, sexual offences against minors come under the jurisdiction of a court. Furthermore, since 1994, sexual offences against minors committed abroad can be reported and prosecuted in France if the accused is French, and since 2013, this possibility has also been extended to all sexual offences committed by French nationals abroad, regardless of the victim's age.

It should be noted that the legal framework is often less restrictive and protective than the safeguarding standards. With regard to the age of consent, for example, the legal framework may define it as 15, whereas the Vatican standards, the MEP charter and the safeguarding standards consider anyone under the age of 18 to be a minor. Any sexual activity by priests, staff, volunteers or other associated persons with anyone under 18, is therefore prohibited by organisations subject to or adhering to these standards. Another significant example is the taking into account of power imbalance, which is spelt out in *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, but is still imperfectly reflected in French law, where the decisive criterion for qualifying as rape or sexual assault is the fact that the act or acts were committed under duress, surprise, threat or violence. In French criminal law, the power differential and the hold that may lead a person to submit to sexual acts are only taken into account in the severity of the penalty (aggravating factor) and not in the classification of the acts.

The French legal framework concerning sexual violence against minors has been strengthened over time, notably with the law of 21 April 2021. Any sexual act or sexual proposition involving a child under the age of 15 is an offence, regardless of the consent expressed. Any sexual assault, regardless of the age of the victim, committed with violence, coercion or surprise, constitutes sexual assault if there has been no sexual penetration, and rape if there has been sexual penetration (art. 222-29). The offences are increased for incestuous rape or if the victim is vulnerable, ill, disabled or threatened by a weapon. Consensual sexual intercourse with a minor over the age of 15 does not constitute an offence, unless the adult has a relationship of ascendancy over the victim. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the MEP Charter stipulates that "in no case does the consent given by the minor victim at the time of the offence or the absence of physical violence remove the criminal status of the offence if the perpetrator is an ascendant, a person with de jure or de facto authority over the victim, or a person who abuses the authority conferred by his or her position".

2. Analysis of the management of reports and responses to allegations of sexual violence reported within MEP between 1950-2024

2.1. Reported cases and allegations of sexual violence

The auditors identified 63 allegations of sexual violence reported during this period, which they selected and sorted using precise criteria. The criteria made it possible to classify the allegations into two distinct categories:

- Proven incidents of sexual violence.
- Allegations of sexual violence relating to potential breaches of criminal law and/or behaviour or practices which do not respect the principles of safeguarding but which have not been confirmed.

The auditors considered a case to be proven either because the priest in question had confessed, or because he had been caught in flagrante delicto, or because an investigation had confirmed the facts.

Of the 63 allegations reported, 8 have been proven.

Claims in the second category may include :

- One or more complaints from victims.
- One or more eyewitness accounts of the same events.
- Allegations that have been corroborated by several sources but have not been investigated.

There are 55 allegations in this second category. Either no investigation has been carried out, or the investigation is still ongoing, or it has not been possible to gather sufficient evidence to conclude whether or not the incidents occurred. In some cases, the audit team recommended that the Board should gather more information or conduct an investigation, given the seriousness of the allegations and evidence gathered. Sometimes there are several testimonies or documents concerning the same incidents, but this is not always the case.

It is important to note that the total number of incidents reported is greater than the number of people implicated, as a priest may have been implicated in several reports for different types of incident. For example, the 63 incidents of sexual violence reported implicate 46 MEP priests, which represents approximately 3% of the total of 1,491 MEP priests in active service between 1950 and 2024.

The 8 alerts that have been classified as proven cases concern acts that can be classified as offences or crimes under French law.

Of the 55 allegations reported, 46 could also be classified as offences or crimes if the facts were confirmed. These incidents concern sexual violence against minors under the age of 15, minors aged between 15 and 18, or adults, sometimes in vulnerable situations. All the incidents reported are contrary to international safeguarding standards, which aim to protect individuals, particularly the most vulnerable, from all forms of violence.

Nine of the allegations reported do not in principle constitute breaches of French law but would, if proven, be unacceptable from the point of view of safeguarding. These include cases where priests are alleged to have paid for sex. From a safeguarding perspective, paying for sex is considered sexual exploitation (see glossary). The United Nations and the NGO sector consider that this practice is not compatible with working for a UN agency or humanitarian organisation, even if it is permitted by law: "It is prohibited to request sexual favours or to impose any other form of humiliating, degrading or servile behaviour in exchange for money, employment, goods or services, including any assistance owed to any person⁴⁰".

Furthermore, Canon 1395 §2 stipulates that if a priest commits sexual acts that cause a serious scandal or are considered to be grave breaches of clerical chastity, he may be sanctioned, which may go as far as deportation to the lay state in the most serious cases. Recourse to prostitution is considered to be behaviour that runs counter to celibacy and priestly dignity.

2.2. Situations that call into question the possibility of free and informed consent

The auditors identified at least 77 cases of priests who had been sexually active or who had married. In the vast majority of these cases, the priests had left the priesthood and married. Although these situations do not constitute offences under criminal law, the auditors were unable to completely exclude them from the analysis presented in this report because the information collected is insufficient to confirm that the people with whom these priests had sexual relations or married were of legal age. Furthermore, the power of priests means that consent to a sexual act or marriage must be treated with caution.

These situations are spread across 15 countries in Asia and the Indian Ocean, with a marked concentration in certain countries such as Japan, Madagascar, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, India and China. It is notable that the majority of incidents concern relationships between a priest and a woman, although homosexual relationships are also identified, albeit more rarely.

A key aspect of this analysis is the age of the partners at the start of the relationship, although precise data is not always available. Relationships (active sexual life of the priest) and marriages involving priests were classified in this category when the age of the wife was not clearly established at the start of the relationship or marriage.

⁴⁰ United Nations Secretary-General's Bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, 2003 (ratified by UN delegates, including France).

These 77 situations are not considered in the analysis presented below, but nevertheless needed to be included in the audit report.

2.3. Low levels of reporting

The total number of allegations of sexual violence recorded over the entire period (74 years) is low. This refers only to incidents that were reported and documented in the MEP archives in Paris or incidents that were known to people who were able to report them during the audit period. It is likely that the actual number of cases of sexual violence perpetrated by MEP priests over the period is much higher than the number of cases recorded during the audit. It can be assumed that a number of cases went unreported while MEP were also unable to identify potential cases of sexual abuse, particularly during periods when there were no arrangements, information or practices in place to identify them.

It is therefore important to note that the analysis proposed is based on fragmentary data. The period considered, the number of mission countries, the number of priests sent on mission since 1950, the associated risk factors and the many obstacles to reporting are all reasons to consider that the actual number of cases of sexual violence is probably higher. It is impossible to estimate the actual number of cases of sexual violence over this period, but as an indication, in France in 2022, only 6% of victims of sexual violence said they had filed a complaint.⁴¹

The low number of reports may be explained by the presence of barriers to reporting. These barriers to reporting include personal and socio-cultural factors as well as structural factors related to the absence of reporting mechanisms and inadequate responses to complaints of sexual violence.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the absence of a system for managing reports during the first decades of this audit, but also the weakness of diocesan reporting instructions in the past, may explain the small number of documented incidents. The perception and management of sexual violence within the Church has also evolved over time. Canon law has made progress on this issue, and the Church has recently introduced a more effective system. Similarly, the MEP society has been taking steps to address this issue for only a few years.

Secondly, the interviews conducted by the auditors revealed that certain cultural factors, particularly in Asian countries, may contribute to the low propensity of individuals to report incidents. Cultural attitudes such as the avoidance of conflict, respect for authority and hierarchy, as well as the priority given to collective harmony over individual situations, are likely to have contributed to a low number of reports. This phenomenon may also be reinforced by elements specific to the ecclesiastical setting in general, in particular the confidential nature of the sacrament of confession, complex dynamics of inverted guilt, sin and victimisation. These complex cultural, psychological and structural factors help

⁴¹ Safety experience and feelings" survey (VRS) 2022.

to explain why victims can sometimes wait years before testifying, whether in Asia or Europe. In addition, the vulnerability and conditions of dependence of certain communities, or of certain individuals within their community, make reporting very difficult, if not impossible.

Thirdly, some allegations may have been reported but not dealt with adequately. During the course of the audit, several people gave evidence of incidents reported in the past which had not given rise to formal procedures. As a result, these incidents are not always documented. Some reports may have been handled informally to avoid scandal, but also because the seriousness of the facts had been underestimated by the people receiving the report. When reading historical documents, the auditors noted the frequent tendency to play down incidents, particularly through the use of words to describe them. Indeed, the use of euphemisms such as "carelessness" or "negligence" in council minutes to describe sexual violence is recurrent and contributes to the invisibility of such violence. This linguistic minimisation can give the impression that the facts are not considered serious or well-founded.

During the analysis of certain reports and field visits, the audit team also observed that the prevalence and tolerance of risky practices could influence the very perception of these risks. For example, promiscuity between adults and children, as well as certain societal practices or social codes, can be interpreted differently depending on the culture, which further complicates the detection and reporting of sexual violence.

2.4. Typology of claims

30 allegations, or nearly half of all reports, concern sexual violence against people under the age of 18 (see figure 1 below).

Allegations of sexual violence against adults concerned 13 reports.

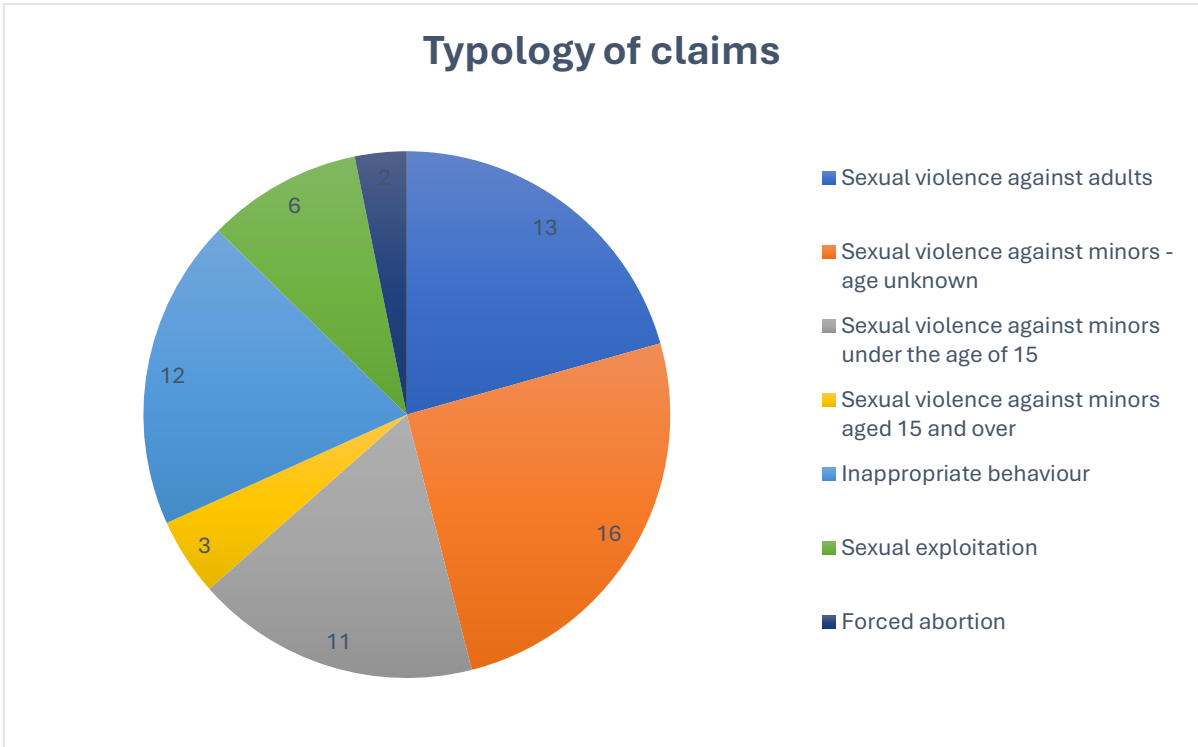


Figure 1: Typology of claims

The allegations recorded in the "sexual exploitation" category indicate that priests have paid for sex. This is problematic from two points of view: firstly, because the age of the persons concerned is not known and they may be minors, and secondly, because from the point of view of safeguarding, exchanging sex for money or any other commodity is not acceptable behaviour.

The 12 reports of inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature group together allegations for which the auditors were unable to qualify the facts described more precisely. There are cases where a priest touched a person inappropriately, but without specifying the body area or the consent of the person touched, which makes it impossible to classify the incident as a sexual assault, a case of exhibitionism, or cases where the priest made sexual propositions, but this is not very explicit. Some situations are not really described, but "carelessness" is mentioned, and it is stated that people who have been subjected to such carelessness have been encouraged to lodge a complaint. By inference, the auditors sometimes considered that if there was something worthy of a complaint then the behaviour in question was probably serious and potentially in breach of the law.

2.5. Geographical breakdown of reports

The graph below (Fig. 2.) shows that the 63 allegations of sexual violence reported between 1950 and 2024 relate to events that took place in 13 different countries. The number of incidents reported and documented varies from country to country. The highest number of incidents was reported in France (19), while a significant number of reports were made in Thailand (10) and Cambodia (7). Although the number of reports in these two countries is significant, there are almost twice as many reports in France, which may come as a surprise.

The relatively high number of reports from France may be due to the fact that the vast majority of MEP priests are French and return to France regularly. Some have even spent extended periods of time working in France, being incardinated into a diocese in France after returning from mission, for example. It is also possible that the French context has been more conducive to reporting incidents or detecting problematic behaviour.

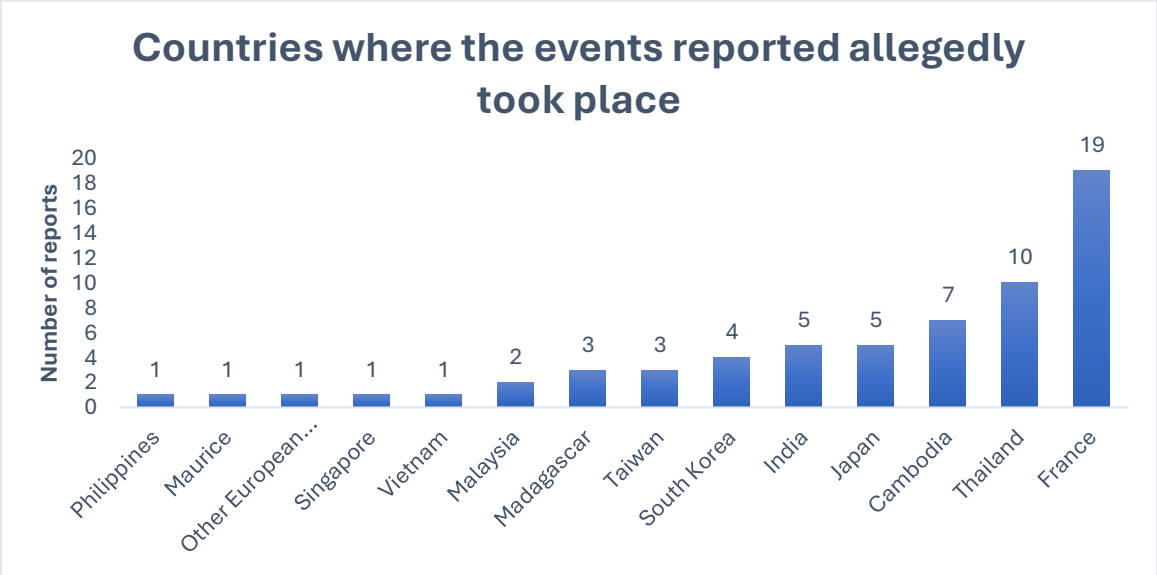


Figure 2: Number of alerts by country

Allegations have been reported in a large number of mission countries but not in all mission countries (14 countries at present but more in the past). The fact that there are no reports in certain mission countries does not mean that there have been no incidents of sexual violence in these countries, but there are none documented in the archives consulted by the auditors.

It is likely that the difference in the number of cases reported between mission countries is linked to the greater or lesser difficulty for victims to report incidents of sexual violence. There are also potentially differences in the way complaints are received locally and incidents documented, from one country to another or from one priest to another. Reports are often made to the Permanent Council by group leaders. Group leaders probably did not have a uniform view of what should be reported to the council, and this may have varied between 1950 and 2000.

Missions in each country may have differed greatly in terms of the number of priests, volunteers, projects and partners over a period of time, with a greater presence increasing the likelihood of violent behaviour and reporting. The diversity of local situations can also mean variations in the way incidents are managed. Disparities between countries in terms of the number of reports can therefore be explained by factors such as the intensity of the institutional presence, the culture of the mission country, and the monitoring and reporting systems in place. Testimonies indicate that practices also vary according to local norms and the attitudes of priests and superiors. Some mission dioceses have committees in place to collect reports and raise awareness in the community, while other dioceses are less active or structured.

As noted above, the audit team considers that the low figures may reflect a lack of available data on potential sexual violence rather than a real absence of violence.

2.6. Changes in the number of incidents identified over time

The auditors' analysis identified some notable changes over the decades. The majority of allegations of sexual violence reported relate to events that took place in the 1970s (19 allegations) and 2010 (16 allegations).

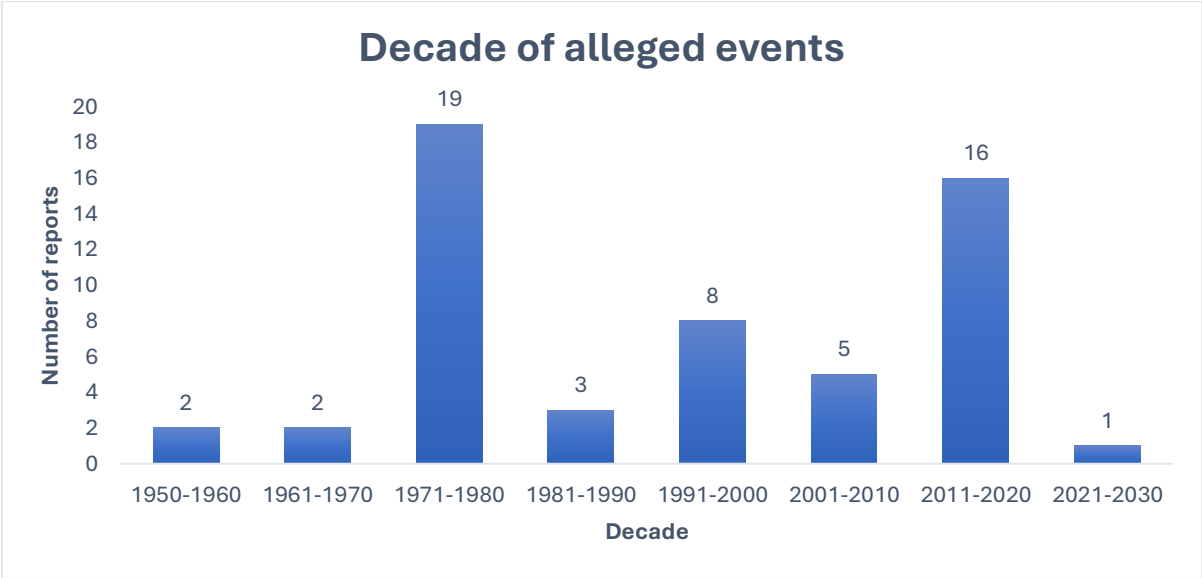


Figure 3. Decade of alleged events⁴²

1950-1970 period

In the years 1950-1970, the audit found very few documented allegations, but those that were recorded appeared to be particularly serious and were reported shortly after the fact. Yet this period coincided with a peak in the number of MEP priests deployed in mission countries, with between 1,000 and 1,200 active priests. The scarcity of reports during this period may be explained by the low level of awareness of these issues among both priests and communities, and by the fact that Church standards and practices were virtually non-existent at the time. One of the MEP priests interviewed summed it up as follows: *"It was the 50s, there was no awareness. There was a culture of silence, even within the family"*. Silence surrounded these issues, both within the Church and in society.

The lack of awareness and tools available for formally reporting potential sexual violence may also have contributed to the lack of detection and documented reporting. Another witness said: *"We weren't told how to report. There was silence on these issues"*. Priests of this generation were ill-prepared to identify, recognise or deal with sexual violence, and the reflex often seemed to be to protect the institution and its members: *"There's a family spirit; when someone makes a blunder, we don't expose it to the outside world"*.

⁴² The decade of the events reported is unknown for 7 of the allegations recorded.

1971-1990 period

The decade from 1971 to 1980 appears to be a pivotal period, marked by a significant peak in the number of reports made by MEP (30% of the total number of allegations). This peak may reflect an increase in sexual violence, or a more systematic documentation of incidents. It is probably a combination of these two factors. 75% of these allegations were reported in the same decade as they occurred.

This period was also marked by a large number of priests leaving the priesthood to marry. The following decade, from 1981 to 1990, saw a decline in the number of reports. It should also be noted that the number of priests continued to fall significantly during this period. Thus, the two decades (1970-1990) stand out within the MEP as a period marked by a relative and absolute increase in reports and/or greater documentation of allegations of sexual violence.

1991-2010 period

The period 1991-2010 shows an increase in reports of sexual violence. Between 1991 and 2010, the number of allegations reported rose to 13, although the number of active priests fell sharply. While there were around 1,000 in 1950, their numbers had fallen to around 160-170 by the end of 2020. This suggests that, proportionally, the ratio of sexual violence to the number of priests has increased, reflecting a persistent level of sexual violence despite the reduction in numbers.

This trend is in line with CIASE data, which show an increase in the number of victims and aggressors recorded from the 1990s onwards. According to the CIASE report, this increase cannot be explained by changes in archiving practices, but rather by a socio-legal context that has encouraged people to speak out and report sexual abuse more systematically. Between 1991 and 2010, the context in France regarding sexual abuse in the Catholic Church changed significantly. Revelations of abuse increased, with more victims having the courage to speak out, not only to the Church but also to the courts and support associations. This period marked a turning point in the Church's attitude, as it began to recognise the suffering of victims, although significant changes in its practices only came about after 2010. The Church was also confronted with major social reforms, including greater recognition of victims' voices. At the same time, French society is becoming aware of the extent of sexual violence, and access to therapeutic and legal resources for victims is improving.

2011-2020 period

The auditors observed a significant increase in reports between 2011 and 2020 (a quarter of the total number of allegations over the period 1950-2024), again this is in spite of the continuing decline in the number of active MEP priests. As a result, the ratio of the number of reports to the number of active priests has continued to rise over this decade. However, 70% of these incidents were reported during the same decade, while 30% were reported later, between 2021 and 2024. This increase could be explained in part by a growing awareness, and increased action, in the face of sexual violence within the Church⁴³ and

⁴³ Emblematic scandals within the Church, such as the Boston affair in 2002, the trial of Cardinal Barbarin between 2016 and 2020, and the publication of the Sauvé report in 2021, have led to a renewal of civil and ecclesiastical legislation. The massive and decisive media coverage of these scandals has encouraged victims to speak out and civil society to mobilise.

MEP society. The reforms introduced by the Vatican in France, as well as within religious institutions and communities, may also have played a key role in this change.

At the same time as this increase in the number of reports, the auditors received concordant testimonies describing worrying practices at the MEP headquarters on rue du Bac during the same period. Between 2011 and 2020, significant shortcomings in safeguarding management were reported. 4 testimonies describe specific events and behaviours, while a larger number of testimonies attest to practices that can be described as lax and a very open house. These testimonies indicate inadequate management of security and reception rules, as well as a lack of clear and formal directives concerning accommodation in Paris and the conditions under which it could take place.

These accounts also state that incidents and conflicts were managed informally at the time. Testimonies also describe ambiguous behaviour on the part of certain priests living on rue du Bac, interpreted as a form of pressure for sexual relations.

Three people reported that it was complicated to report problematic behaviour, either because there was no clear mechanism or because they considered that board members might be close to the people whose behaviour they wished to report. Two people who spoke to the audit team said that reports had been made and concerns expressed to the board during this period, although the auditors had not found the documents in question.

This apparent lack of enforcement may have contributed to a permissive environment with intimidating practices, as described in the interviews, and could be interpreted as a form of neglect. The interviews highlighted behaviour and comments by MEP priests that were described as ambiguous or even inappropriate, attitudes that reflected a lack of appropriate distance, an equivocal atmosphere and solicitations, as well as dynamics of control and power games. These testimonies describe an environment where inappropriate behaviour was not sanctioned by measures to reinforce the internal rules and framework, which may not have been present, clear or shared with all stakeholders. As a result, the people interviewed mentioned the difficulties they encountered in expressing their discomfort, not knowing who to turn to.

This was a period when, moreover, the few reports made did not seem to have been formally followed up with civil and religious authorities, as the audit was unable to find any trace of them in the files made available. However, the period 2016-2021 saw the first safeguarding initiatives coexist - with the sharing of CORREF protocols, the presentation of the charter and the participation of council members in various training events on the issue of sexual violence in the Church - with the practices described above, which rather highlight a lack of safeguarding framework and exposure of rue du Bac residents to increased risks.

2021-2024 period

In recent years, the growing awareness of MEP members combined with a form of media pressure, the indictment of an MEP priest, but also reforms within the Church and changes in society have sharpened the leadership of the new Superior General and the MEP Council towards systematic reporting of MEP priests alleged to be perpetrators of sexual offences, to the Public Prosecutor. The documentation from this period also shows

a stricter adherence to the recommendations of the charter and pontifical norms, as well as a strengthening of procedures and a clarification of the stages in the management of incidents very recently (appendix 2). This period is also assessed in the section dedicated to "Section 3: Managing alerts" in Part A of the report.

2.7. Reporting sources and reporters

According to the information gathered, the majority of reports were made by one or more witnesses (29), while an almost equally large number of reports came directly from victims (24). In at least 3 cases, the victims reported the incidents to the local bishop or diocese and not directly to the MEP. 5 reports were made by members of a victim's family and in 4 cases the priest himself spoke out about the events. One allegation was reported by a volunteer.

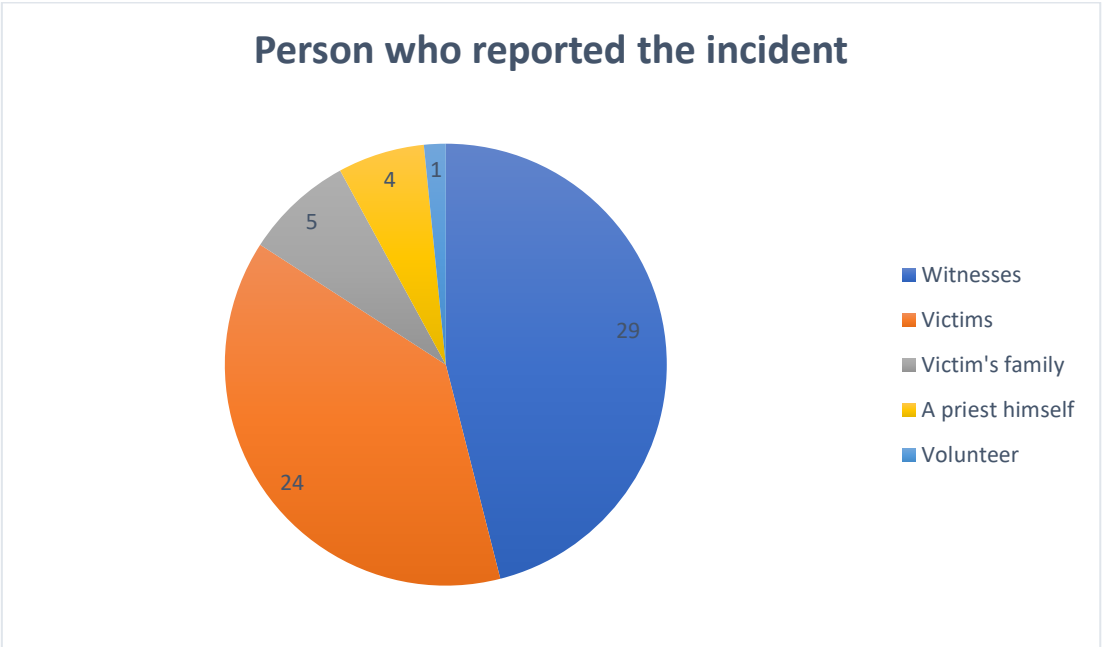


Figure 4. Profile of the person who reported the incident

These reporting channels highlight the key role played by the people directly involved, who witnessed the events or to whom the victims confided, in the reporting process. The volunteer identified here can be associated with the category of witness because he was a witness to the events. The victim's immediate circle seems to be essential for detection and reporting.

The more limited involvement of the bishops demonstrates the importance of the means available within the dioceses to report incidents of sexual violence. Some documented allegations indicate that victims and witnesses have chosen to contact the diocese, particularly over the last 20 years.

2.8. Profile of victims/survivors⁴⁴

Number of victims

Of the 63 incidents of sexual violence reported, 38 incidents suggest the presence of a single victim, while 25 incidents involve several victims whose number cannot be established. There is, for example, the case of a priest in the 1950s who was accused of paedocriminality by 9 children in his mission country. He admitted sexually abusing 3 of them. After an internal investigation, he was expelled from the MEP but was later convicted in France for sexual violence against minors. In this case, the actual number of victims is therefore probably higher than the number of known victims.

In some cases of sexual violence, it is unlikely that a person who has committed such violence against another person has done so only once, especially if the facts have not been reported to the MEP or the authorities or if there has been no investigation, punishment or conviction.

Multiple victims may indicate patterns of repeated sexual violence against different people, but also of repeated sexual violence against the same victims. Several people may have been subjected to sexual violence by the same priest, particularly in environments such as boarding schools, reception or transit centres for refugees or internally displaced persons, or where the priest has used vulnerable sex workers. For the investigation team, it is reasonable to assume that the number of victims far exceeds the number of incidents of sexual violence reported and recorded for the period between 1950 and 2024.

Age of victims

The graph below shows three main groups: adults (over 18), minors (under 18) and minors of unknown age.

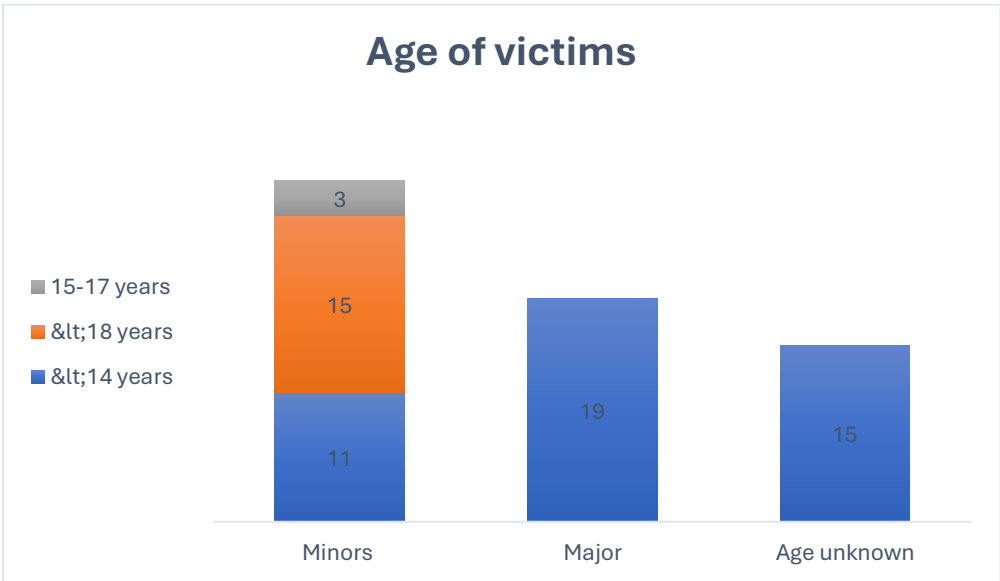


Figure 5. Age of victims

⁴⁴ Definition based on the victim-centred approach (UN Resolution on assistance to victims - December 2007).

In the allegations analysed, almost half of the victims were minors, with 29 allegations specifying the victim's age or simply the fact that she was a minor. 15 allegations did not specify the victim's age. In the documents consulted, terms such as "young", "boy" or "girl" are frequently used to describe the victims, but without specifying the age, which is necessary to fully describe the facts. The auditors consider it likely that some of the allegations for which the age of the victims is not known concern minors.

There are 19 allegations concerning adult victims and potentially more, since it can be assumed that some of the victims whose ages are unknown are over 18.

Demography and sociology of victims and vulnerability

An analysis of incidents of sexual violence reported between 1950 and 2024 reveals significant differences in terms of the status and role of victims in the contexts concerned. Victims were described as students, parishioners, home helps, refugees, adopted daughters or members of the community, with profiles indicating relative vulnerability and an asymmetrical relationship with a priest, who was also a foreigner.

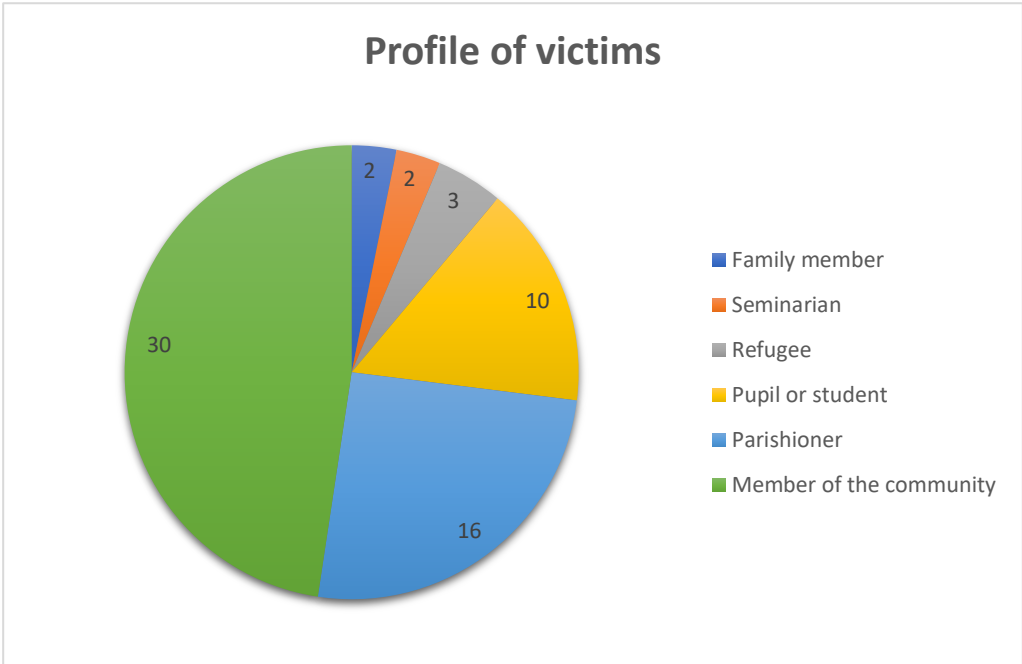


Figure 6. Profile of victims

During the interviews conducted for the audit, several people expressed the feeling that relationships of authority and dependence negate any possibility of consent. As one lay witness put it: "You can't give consent when you're a girl with no money, no means of survival, faced with someone who has authority, spiritual and temporal power, and when you trust the institution of the MEP".

Gender and victims ⁴⁵

In the majority of reports made, the victims are women or girls (60%). However, the proportion of male victims (37%) is significant.

⁴⁵ This refers to the presumed gender of the persons as indicated in the documents consulted.

It is important to remember that sexual violence against men is less frequently reported than sexual violence against women. The taboo associated with sexual violence against boys and men can make these victims less likely to report incidents, due to gender stereotypes that present them as supposedly capable of defending themselves. In addition, the Church's sexual morality and view of homosexuality as a sin reinforces the silence surrounding potential violence against boys and men.

Studies of Catholic Church archives in several countries have shown that environments where boys were under the direct authority of priests or other authority figures, such as minor seminaries and boarding schools, may have exposed them to an increased risk of sexual violence.

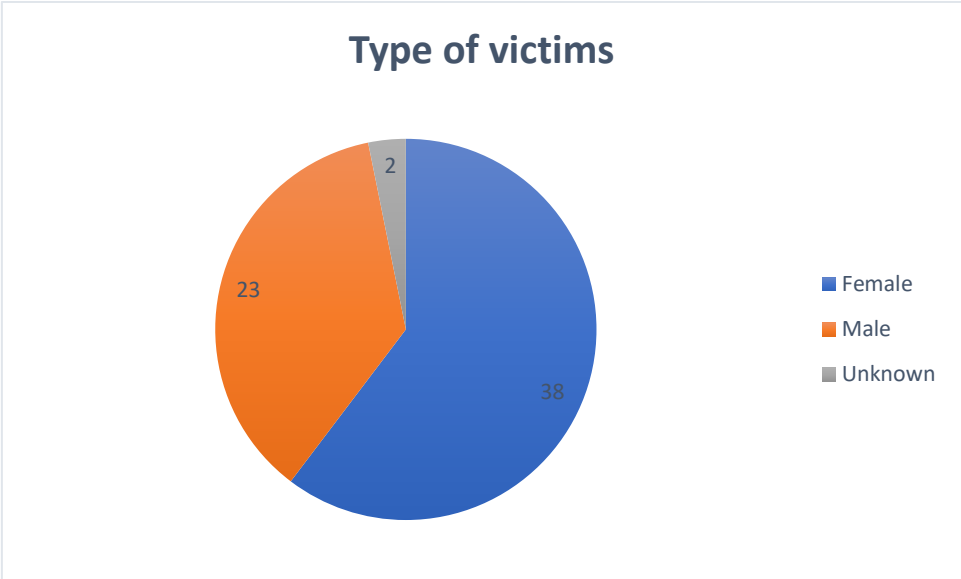


Figure 7: Gender of victims

It is also crucial to recognise that the way in which certain relationships have been perceived by witnesses, colleagues and group leaders is important. For example, many situations involving sexual relations with adult women have been presumed to be consensual. This automatic presumption of consent is problematic because it overlooks fundamental elements of safeguarding, such as the balance of power, the absence of coercion and, therefore, the possibility of consent. By omitting these essential criteria, there is a risk of underestimating the seriousness of certain situations where consent may not have been fully informed or freely given, and where the conditions for valid consent were not really met. Analysing these situations retrospectively (e.g. a marriage that has lasted and appears happy) does not erase the potential power imbalance when the relationship began.

2.9. Support and assistance for victims /survivors

The existing documentation on reported allegations of sexual violence contains little information on the follow-up of victims or their access to services to deal with their needs (medical, psychological, legal, etc.). Where measures have been taken to provide support

to victims, these are usually not documented. For the majority of reports, it seems that such support was not offered, but the lack of documentation means that this cannot be confirmed.

Some victims have reported their situation locally through the channels of their diocese, but these reports and the steps taken by the diocese are not documented in the MEP. The correspondence available sometimes indicates that an investigation has been carried out by the diocese and the conclusion of that investigation, but there is no information about any support given to the investigation.

The available literature suggests a systemic flaw in victim care and/or in the documentation of victim care, with a primary focus on reporting incidents, rather than on the resources needed to help victims.

However, there are some exceptions. The pregnancies and births of children whose fathers were MEP priests gave rise to almost automatic support. This practice is standardised and documented. It is not specific to the MEP and correspondence between the MEP and Rome shows that there are clear instructions for these cases.

Problematic practices were commonplace within MEP, especially in the past. Victims' accounts were often minimised, questioned and discredited. The term "calumny" is regularly used in correspondence between priests about allegations of sexual abuse. This term indicates that allegations of sexual violence were considered to be lies, attempts to harm the accused. The protective reflex of confreres and the institution, as well as ignorance of the mechanisms of violence, fuelled this behaviour.

3. Responses to alerts

Practices for managing alerts appear to have undergone a turning point from 2016 onwards, but it is difficult to distinguish periods with distinct practices before 1950 and 2015, despite the fact that this is a long period. It would appear that practices have changed little over several decades. This is why the auditors only distinguished two sequences, 1950 to 2015 and 2016 to 2024.

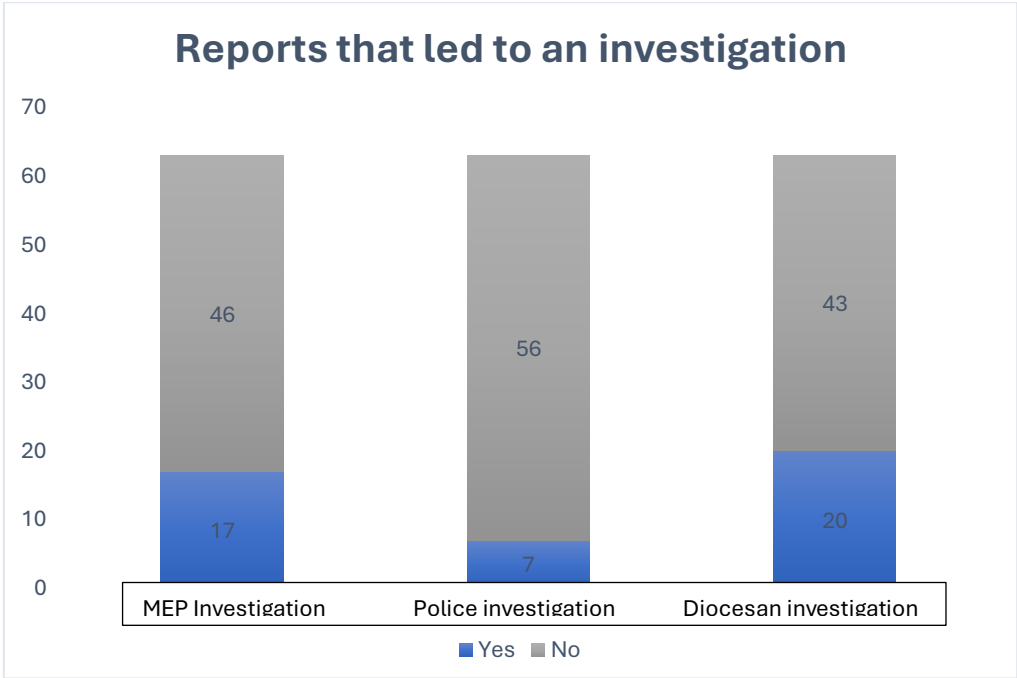


Figure 8. Reports that led to an investigation

Of the 63 allegations of sexual violence recorded, very few investigations have been carried out, whether on the initiative of the MEP, the police or the dioceses. The MEP has initiated 17 investigations, 7 of which are still in progress. Only 7 allegations are being or have been investigated by the police, and the dioceses have investigated 20 allegations, the highest rate of the three categories of investigation.

No allegation was the subject of three investigations (MEP, diocese and police) but around 10 allegations were the subject of two types of investigation, most often an MEP investigation and a diocesan investigation.

According to the archives consulted, when a diocese has carried out an investigation into an allegation concerning an MEP priest, the report is not communicated to the MEP. Only the conclusion is transmitted. The auditors have sometimes recommended that the MEP contact the dioceses concerned to obtain more details about the allegations and investigations.

3.1. Management of incidents of sexual violence reported between 1950 and 2016

Documentation of incident reporting and management

It is important to note that the documentation of reported incidents of sexual violence, particularly the oldest ones, is always partial, which makes analysis difficult and

sometimes impossible. For example, the victim's age is not always specified. For some incidents, there are letters attesting to communications, requests and recommendations in the management of the incident, but not for others. The documents consulted are most often exchanges of letters. More often than not, they are not grouped together in a file intended to document a report, but rather are spread across different priest files.

Reporting and management deadlines

The review of reported incidents of sexual violence revealed significant disparities in the time taken to report incidents, which may have had an impact on the time taken to process incidents and on the processing itself. The auditors were unable to identify any standard process for managing reports. Similar incidents may have been handled very differently.

The 1950s and 1990s show a number of reported incidents of sexual violence that were generally reported quickly after they occurred. To give an example of the differences in time taken, a case of sexual violence against minors in the 1950s could be dealt with in 3 and a half months between the formal report, the internal investigation and the decision to exclude the offender from the MEP society. On the other hand, the period 1990-2020 shows significant delays between knowledge of the facts and their reporting or internal handling.

Reporting to civil authorities

In the documents consulted for this period, the auditors did not identify any situations that had been reported to the civil authorities in France or in the mission countries where the events were reported.

Reporting to religious authorities

The auditors did not observe any systematic reporting of sexual violence to the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples or the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Some behaviours were reported and led to expulsion or a request to return to the lay state, but these were most often priests who had decided to live in a marital relationship.

Administrative enquiries

The audit team did not see any investigation reports concerning reports prior to 2000. That said, investigations did take place and are sometimes mentioned in documents. They may have been carried out by an MEP priest, someone from the diocese or sisters from a neighbouring religious order. The archives also reveal cases of minimisation accompanied by justifications for not investigating. For example, in the file of a priest accused of serious misconduct, an official wrote that it was not advisable to shed light on the matter, even though he stated that the facts were clear. Another example of a report in the early 2000s was made by an adult victim who, in a letter, made serious accusations against a priest. In the file in question, the only documented follow-up was a post-it note stating "pure slander, she is a sick woman", with no mention of the need to verify the allegations or to provide the person with assistance and protection.

Measures taken against respondents

Although strict measures have been put in place more recently when priests are accused of sexual violence, in most cases the people implicated by the allegations have been able to continue to exercise their ministry without suffering sanctions, thus creating a climate of impunity. In one case of proven sexual violence for which the MEP excluded a priest, he received support from the society with a view to his incardination on his return to France.

With regard to the allegations analysed for this period, the institutional responses were not uniform and were most often limited to transfers and reassignments of priests. In many situations, the MEP decided to move the accused priest, sometimes to another country, sometimes to a different region within the same country, without any long-term follow-up or plan to prevent recidivism. The Council has also sometimes offered an administrative position in France to the priest in question.

At least nine priests who were the subject of allegations were transferred to another mission country, another diocese or to France. Most of them first underwent a period of "cure" or "reflection" on the meaning of their priesthood. The priests were then allowed to continue their mission without further supervision, at the risk of reoffending. In one case involving allegations of sexual violence against minors, *the explanation given by the accused priest "physical fatigue and, above all, moral exhaustion" was considered credible. The response proposed was therefore a period of reflection and a transfer to another geographical location, as if it were a medical or psychological problem.*

In at least two reported incidents of sexual abuse, the audit documented a resolution that could be described as amicable. First, a letter from a bishop describing the scandalous behaviour of a priest: *"The priest sexually abused or took advantage of a woman, or perhaps 'women', and in one case forced her to have an abortion. Canon 1395 of the Code of Canon Law requires that he be "punished" for the scandal he has caused. I have evidence and testimony to that effect. Moreover, he has personally confessed to me (Canon 277). I therefore ask you to recall your priest to France. I do not want him in my diocese".* A review of the documentation on this priest shows that he continued his priesthood in France and that there was no investigation or sanction other than his exclusion from the mission. Another exchange of e-mails, concerning the same priest when he wished to return to his former mission country, shows a level of institutional concern, geared towards avoiding scandal rather than verifying the facts and assisting the victim: *"Does she still hold a grudge against you? Does she give guarantees that she won't make a fuss? Or do you want to come back and ignore her?"*

Protecting the reputation of the institution rather than justice for the victims seems to influence response strategies over this long period.

Other situations show a lack of follow-up. A priest on mission in one country, having had to leave his first mission country, was found by chance in another mission country, working with orphans and street children without the authorisation or control of the MEP. In this case from the 1980s, a priest testifies that he *"was shocked to see a little girl sleeping in a bed under the priest's bed. The centre was run with funds from individuals who supported the priest. The centre was spread over several flats in an area known for prostitution and night bars".* This should have raised concerns about the safety of the

children. However, no formal investigation was carried out, and the priest continued his activities. A few testimonies attest to the perception of impunity and silence surrounding these issues. One lay person describes the frustration of a person who reported in the early 2000s: "*X was disgusted and reported it. The message was not to make waves. If it's not true, we don't want to implicate the people*". This person added during the interview "*By dint of protecting, we protect the system*".

Finally, many of the priests involved in allegations from this period are now deceased, which makes investigations particularly difficult and limits victims' chances of obtaining justice. This means that the possibility of reparation is now more complicated for them, even if it is possible to refer the matter to the Commission for Recognition and Reparation.⁴⁶

Assistance to victims

The documents consulted by the auditors do not mention any systematic support measures for victims of sexual violence during the period 1950-2015. The auditors did not find any assistance practices for victims of sexual violence, except in one case involving a minor. The psychological consequences, as well as those relating to social and emotional development, are reportedly dealt with only very rarely, and awareness of the impact on victims does not seem to be considered.

Although not systematically included in the 63 reports of sexual violence retained due to the lack of precision regarding the conditions of consent, the situation of women who became pregnant after sexual relations with MEP priests is relevant in this respect. These women have systematically received financial assistance, sometimes over many years, in order to guarantee dignified living conditions and education for themselves and their children. Correspondence between the MEP Council and the Vatican, as well as between MEP priests, confirms that this aid was seen as a duty of reparation on the part of the priest and society. This example shows the existence of systematic assistance procedures in certain situations. However, it is possible that some of these pregnancies occurred as a result of non-consensual sex, although this is not systematically stated. As mentioned earlier, sexual relations between a priest and an adult woman were generally considered to be consensual by default but would merit a more detailed exploration of power dynamics.

Assistance to priests implicated

When precautionary measures were applied, such as the temporary suspension of the MEP priest from all or part of his duties or removal to an identified location, in accordance with ecclesiastical practice, they were often accompanied by ongoing support for the priests from the institution. The MEP insist on respect for the presumption of innocence, citing the need for support: "*They are listened to and the presumption of innocence is respected*". In the meantime, the priests received spiritual and psychological support in a spirit of fraternal charity.

Between 1950 and 2015, the MEP often recommended "spiritual retraining", sometimes lasting several years, as well as cures or therapies, for priests suspected of sexual

⁴⁶ <https://www.reconnaissancereparation.org/>

violence. The auditors noted a tendency to psychologise or medicalise these situations, as the violence is often perceived as a pathology. This type of approach to dealing with sexual violence failed to grasp some of the fundamental elements, in particular the risk of believing that after a period of reflection or therapy, it would be safe to move a priest. However, analysis of the archives suggests that these practices contributed to minimising the seriousness of the facts and reinforcing a feeling of impunity. For example, a priest accused of making inappropriate advances on a mission to a 15-year-old girl in the 2000s, by "*offering her money to do things to her that she shouldn't do*", was appointed to a parish in France, with the intention that "*after he had cured himself, he could resume ministry in a diocese.*" Similarly, in the 1990s, a priest who had had an affair with a sewing student at a sister's house was simply transferred. According to a priest witness, the girl "*must have been 18*" and had had a child with this priest. According to this witness: "*He was sent to another mission where he continued his priesthood*". The father in charge of the group asked the pregnant girl to return to her region and promised to pay her a monthly viaticum. Paris was informed of the situation.

The priest in question was sometimes pitied and protected by his superiors, rather than held accountable. At the time, exclusion from his diocese of origin and retirement in France were considered sufficient sanctions. Exclusions were rare (the audit team listed only one). In several situations, priests were even assigned to critical positions of responsibility. For example, a priest who had committed "*serious recklessness*" with young boys was transferred to another mission to "*have a chance to start a new life*". The bishop and the superior general expressed their conviction that "*the father will be able [...] to turn his other appreciable qualities to good account and thus make amends for the unfortunate past*".

3.2. Management of incidents of sexual violence reported between 2016 and 2024

Documentation of reports and management of reported incidents of sexual violence

More extensive documentation was provided to the audit team concerning allegations of sexual violence reported more recently. Some cases were even documented in great detail. In most cases, these are incidents that required an internal investigation. This more systematic documentation was initiated by the CEO in 2016 and was handed over when the current CEO took over.

Reporting to civil and religious authorities

One volunteer was reported by the MEP to the Paris public prosecutor in 2016. This was the only report made to the public prosecutor before the current Board was elected.

Under the leadership of the current Superior General, reports to the civil authorities have been made quickly and systematically. It is important to note that prior to the current Superior General, no MEP priest had been reported to the public prosecutor. Reports to the religious authorities (Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and for the Doctrine of the Faith) were also made in accordance with the rules laid down in the Vatican standards and in the charter of pastoral ethics.

It should be noted that, in relation to these more recent allegations of sexual abuse, reports have been made to the authorities in France, although in some cases the events took place abroad. The audit stresses that the role of the current council and the Superior General is decisive in the way in which the reported allegations of sexual abuse have been dealt with recently. However, one witness observed: *"The members of the new council have no conflict of interest with the people implicated, but these matters must not be dealt with only internally in the church, as there is too much of a clan spirit and corporatism. We need an outside perspective"*. The recent creation of the Evaluation Committee for handling serious or worrying information about abuse involving a member of the MEP, chaired by the general delegate for protection and whose members are people from outside the MEP, is a step in this direction. The creation of a checklist for managing these concerns, detailing the stages and the roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the management of an incident.

Administrative enquiries

Recent developments, particularly between 2021 and 2024, show greater responsiveness and a standardisation of reporting procedures, with stricter application of the directives contained in the charter and pontifical standards. The Motu Proprio "Vos Estis Lux Mundi" and the reforms within the Church of France have also contributed to this systematisation of reporting and a faster response to abuse.

The audit had access to several reports of investigations into allegations of sexual violence reported recently. These investigations were the subject of a decree by the Superior General in accordance with canon law and of a report to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. They are confidential and relatively detailed. In one of the incidents, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith requested a further investigation, which was carried out. The auditors were also able to note that in some cases the Superior General asked the National Canonical Penal Tribunal (TPCN) to conduct the investigations itself for reasons of objectivity and also capacity.

However, despite these encouraging developments, an examination of the investigation reports revealed a number of shortcomings in the practices of the MEP, in particular a lack of methodological rigour. The priests responsible for carrying out these investigations have not received specific training in safeguarding investigations. In addition, it is important to note that the investigators responsible for managing incidents of sexual violence reported internally, often come from the diocese or the MEP society, which undermines their impartiality. In addition, the auditors found that the priest in question is often confronted very early on in the process, sometimes even before a full investigation has been carried out. This can put victims and witnesses at risk and does not allow sufficient evidence to be gathered before confronting the accused. In addition, the time between a report and the start of an investigation can be very long (several months). The lack of communication during this period can give an impression of impunity and inaction on the part of the MEP. Several of the interviews conducted by the auditors mentioned these feelings.

However, an analysis of investigation practices within the MEP reveals recent efforts to improve rigour. During an interview, an MEP priest remained confident in the measures

recently taken by the Church and the MEP: *"At least the silence has been broken, and if there is an awareness and recognition, that will enable progress to be made"*.

Measures taken against alleged perpetrators

With regard to certain reported incidents involving priests still alive, for which no investigation or conclusion has necessarily been established, the auditors have alerted the MEP to these situations and made recommendations.

As some procedures are underway, the MEP have preferred not to launch an internal investigation so as not to interfere with the work of the courts. However, it is sometimes possible to conduct an internal investigation in parallel with that of the police, subject to the latter's agreement. The audit team recommends this approach to avoid delaying the implementation of precautionary measures if the internal investigation, which has objectives distinct from those of the police investigation, reveals behaviour in breach of the charter of pastoral ethics and the rules of ethics of MEP in the exercise of the priesthood. This internal investigation can also enable risks to be assessed and addressed more quickly, whereas a police investigation is likely to take a long time without prioritising the prevention of additional risks. Even without an internal investigation, potential risks can be assessed and mitigating measures established to ensure the protection of all concerned.

3.3. Receiving alerts

Analysis of the documents available and the interviews conducted as part of the audit reveal that the MEP respond inadequately to people reporting potential sexual violence. At least 5 people who have tried to raise the alarm about allegations of sexual violence since the end of the 90s have described problematic responses on the part of the MEP: failure to listen, questioning of the testimony, failure to take account of the potential trauma to which the witnesses had been exposed, insufficient measures and/or insufficient communication which gave the impression of a problematic inaction with regard to the seriousness of the facts reported. These people, priests, volunteers and lay people close to the MEP, were disappointed with the response to their reports.

Other practices show how little faith can be placed in testimony. An MEP priest wrote about an incident a few years ago: *"Priest XX advised me, before going to meet the bishop, to meet the witness again, in order to listen more objectively and to point out the consequences of her statements. In this way, she could, if necessary, qualify or modify her statements so that they were as objective as possible. X thought this was important, because he feared that the woman was exaggerating the facts. Although this was not necessarily the intention of the priest who made this recommendation, what he suggests can be seen as an attempt to intimidate the person who reported the facts."*

However, better practice in terms of listening, confidentiality and support for witnesses is emerging, and the audit was an opportunity to make recommendations in this area. Secure reporting systems have been put in place, along with confidentiality measures to protect their identity. These new measures also include the implementation of clear and

transparent processes to manage reporting while minimising the risk of reprisals or marginalisation, thus providing a safer environment for those who choose to speak out.

Conclusion

This safeguarding audit enabled a thorough and meticulous evaluation of safeguarding practices within the MEP Society, from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Nearly 4,000 documents were examined, enabling in-depth archival research into 350 priests who had been the subject of particular interest over the past 74 years. One hundred and seventy people were interviewed as part of this vast collection of information carried out in 15 countries. As a result, the audit and its findings, detailed in this report, provide MEP with a solid baseline study that clarifies practices relating to the handling of allegations of sexual violence, from 1950 to the present day, as well as offering an insight into the safeguarding measures currently being implemented within the Society. Visits to mission countries and numerous interviews enabled current safeguarding practices to be assessed against standards generally recognised as exemplary within the Church. During the audit, the Church in Rome also published the Universal Guidelines, the standards now applicable to all Catholic entities.

Looking back over the past decades, and in the light of current knowledge and experience of safeguarding, it is difficult not to feel affected by the sexual violence allegedly perpetrated by some priests on the vulnerable people they were supposed to serve and protect, and by the way in which this behaviour was sometimes minimised or ignored. Sadly, this was a common occurrence in many religious institutions, and more widely in other institutions in society. The audit has brought to light some of the darker aspects of the MEP's history, but we were encouraged to do so, and it was clear from the outset that the MEP was determined to learn as much as possible about what had happened in order to talk openly about it and to commit to changing the culture that allowed these terrible events to happen and the inadequate responses that were often made to them. The audit also shows that these allegations are not all limited to the distant past. Indeed, MEP still deal with current allegations, although they are approached differently today.

In addition to the recording of alerts, this historical perspective provides an opportunity for reflection and learning that will be essential in guiding the MEP through the evolution of cultural change. Assessing current safeguarding performance against the standards contained in the Universal Guidelines and accompanying recommendations also forms the basis of the next stage for MEP. The lessons learned from past reports and the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of current preventive measures will have to be translated into a strategic action plan aimed at transforming the MEP into a religious society that places the protection of individuals at the heart of all its actions. This will be a demanding process. As the audit has shown, progress has been made in the right direction in terms of safeguarding, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that everyone in the MEP understands what safeguarding means, is fully aware of their responsibilities in this area and feels completely comfortable discussing it openly, including with parishioners and other members of the community.

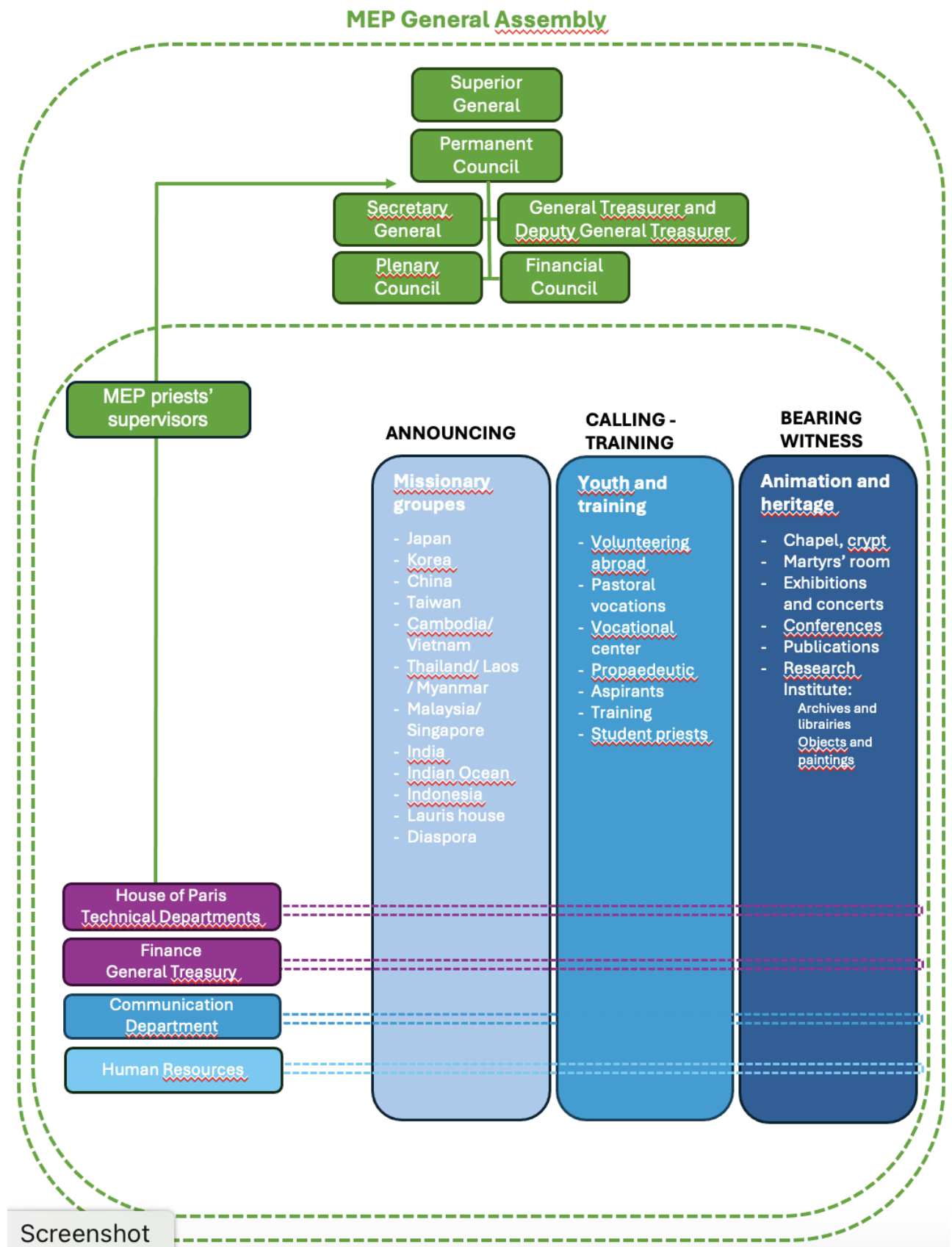
Some of the differences in perspectives on safeguarding identified in the audit are generational, with some younger priests being more comfortable with the changes required and even asking for more, although the situation is not that simple. Current Church initiatives should provide support and impetus to the MEP and its leadership as it strives to implement changes in the direction set by Pope Francis and the work of the

Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. MEP management also appears to the audit team to be committed to the developments necessary to make MEP a 'safe organisation'. Thus, important facilitating factors, both internal and external, have been identified by the audit, and will help to create the right conditions for change. However, putting in place a comprehensive safeguarding system that instils a robust safety culture is a challenge for any organisation, and while it requires significant and sustained effort, it will also require a patient and strategic approach.

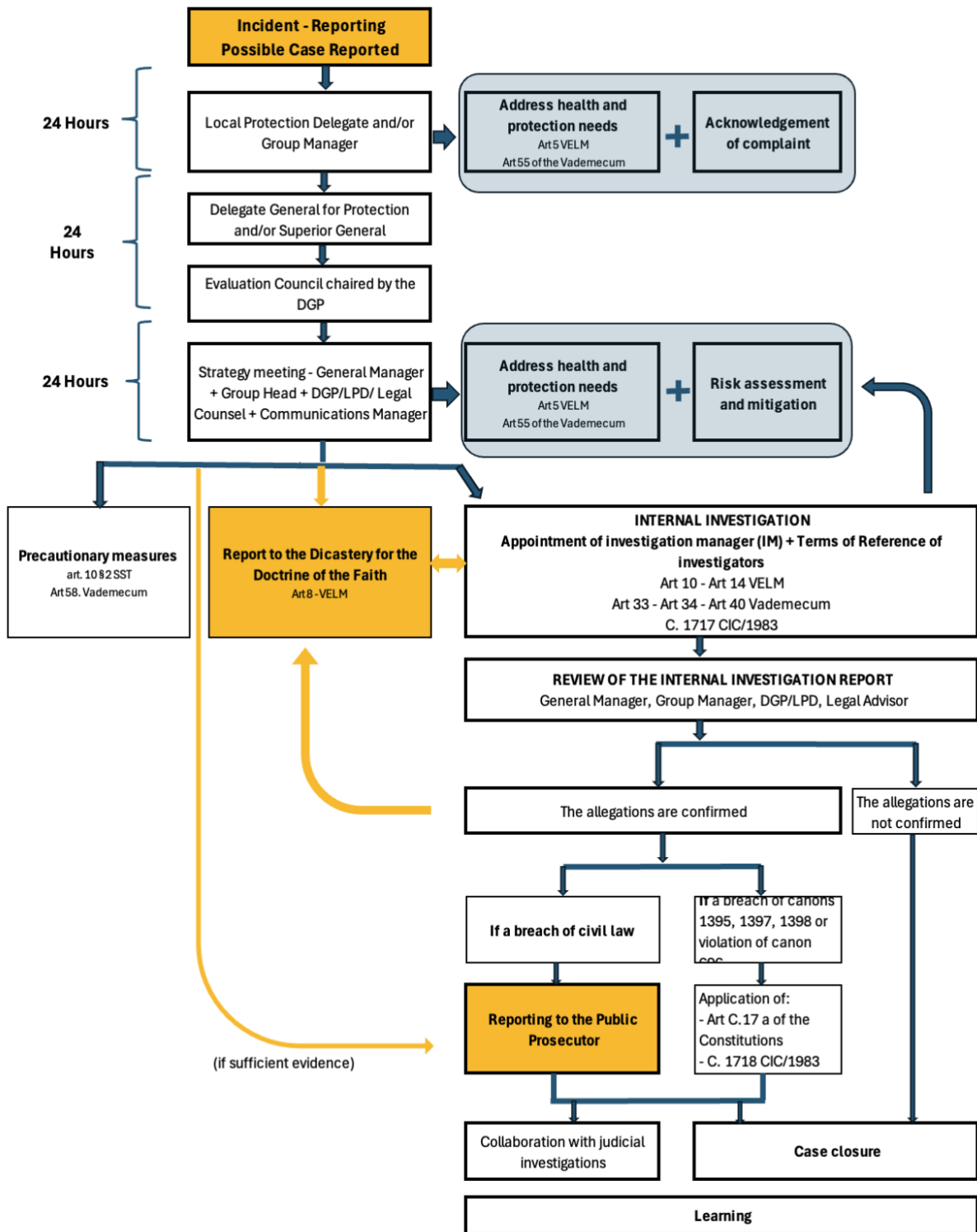
The audit highlighted the need for dedicated and experienced human resources to support these developments over time, the need for in-depth training to assimilate the revised policies and codes, and to strengthen the skills of all those involved in or connected with the Society. Reporting mechanisms and the handling of reports, including investigations, are areas for development: it is essential to focus on proactive and preventive safeguarding measures to reduce the risk of safeguarding incidents, while ensuring that any incidents that do occur are managed better than in the past. The audit also identified the need to improve communication about safeguarding, particularly with community members and children in those communities. Raising awareness is an essential safeguarding measure that can help potential victims to protect themselves or take action when they are at risk or threatened. However, the audit also recognised the challenges and difficulties of discussing safeguarding more openly within communities, and even within MEP in some of the contexts where it has a presence. Safeguarding measures will need to be adapted locally, in collaboration with MEP priests, dioceses and communities, so that they are relevant and appropriate to the contexts and mission of the MEP in each country.

As detailed at the beginning of the report, the audit has been a demanding process in many respects, but the report has sought to reflect with honesty and integrity the state of safeguarding within MEP over the last eight decades. The content is sometimes difficult to read, but it is to MEP's credit that it has encouraged this in-depth review and is willing to publish the results in full. There seems to be a real willingness on the part of MEP to learn, change and learn lessons in order to put in place an action plan that will build on current strengths and aim for the cultural change needed to address the shortcomings highlighted by the audit.

Appendix 1: MEP Organisation chart



Appendix 2: Steps in managing an alert ⁴⁷



⁴⁷ Sources: Protection Officer Roadmap, VELM and Vademecum

Appendix 3: Changes in legal definitions and provisions concerning sexual violence as a criminal offence during the audit period

Rape

Created by the law of 23 December 1980

Article 332: Any act of sexual penetration of any kind committed against another person by violence, coercion or surprise is rape.

Rape will be punishable by five to ten years' imprisonment.

However, rape will be punishable by ten to twenty years' rigorous imprisonment when committed either on a person who is particularly vulnerable due to pregnancy, illness, infirmity or physical or mental disability, or on a minor aged under fifteen, or under the threat of a weapon, or by two or more perpetrators, unless the perpetrator can prove that she has received the victim's consent or, if the victim is a minor, that of the person with parental authority or the legal representative.

Changes

- Amendment by the Act of 1 March 1994
Article 222-23: Any act of sexual penetration of any kind whatsoever committed against another person by violence, coercion, threat or surprise is rape. Rape is punishable by fifteen years imprisonment.
- Amendment by the Act of 3 August 2018
Article 222-23: Any act of sexual penetration, of any kind whatsoever, committed on the person of another or on the person of the perpetrator by violence, coercion, threat or surprise is rape. Rape is punishable by fifteen years' imprisonment.
- Amendment by the Act of 21 April 2021
Article 222-23: Any act of sexual penetration of any kind whatsoever, or any oral or genital act committed on another person or on the person of the perpetrator by violence, coercion, threat or surprise is rape. Rape is punishable by fifteen years imprisonment.

Created by the Act of 21 April 2021

Article 222-23-1: Apart from the case provided for in article 222-23, any act of sexual penetration of any kind whatsoever, or any oral or genital act committed by an adult on the person of a minor of fifteen years of age or committed on the perpetrator by the minor, where the difference in age between the adult and the minor is at least five years, also constitutes rape. The age difference condition provided for in the first paragraph of this article does not apply if the acts are committed in exchange for remuneration, a promise of remuneration, the provision of a benefit in kind or the promise of such a benefit.

Article 222-23-2: Except in the case provided for in article 222-23, incestuous rape constitutes any act of sexual penetration of any kind whatsoever or any oral or genital act committed by an adult on the person of a minor or committed on the perpetrator by the minor, when the adult is an ascendant or any other person mentioned in article 222-22-3 who has de jure or de facto authority over the minor.

Sexual assault

Created by the law of 27 February 1810

Article 333: Any other indecent assault committed or attempted with violence, coercion or surprise on a person other than a minor of fifteen years of age shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of three to five years and a fine of 6,000 to 60,000 francs, or by one of these two penalties only.

However, indecent assault as defined in the first paragraph shall be punishable by five to ten years' imprisonment and a fine of 12,000 to 120,000 francs, or by one of these two penalties only, when committed or attempted either on a person who is particularly vulnerable by reason of illness, infirmity or physical or mental deficiency, or on a person who is a victim of sexual assault.⁰⁰⁰ For one of these two penalties only when it has been committed or attempted either on a person who is particularly vulnerable due to illness, infirmity or a physical or mental deficiency or a state of pregnancy, or under the threat of a weapon, or by a legitimate, natural or adoptive ascendant of the victim or by a person having authority over him or her, or by two or more perpetrators or accomplices, or by a person who has abused the authority conferred by his or her position.

Changes

- Amendment by the Act of 1 March 1994
Article 222-27: Sexual assault other than rape is punishable by five years imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 francs.
- Amendment by the law of 1 January 2002
Article 222-27: Sexual assault other than rape is punishable by five years imprisonment and a fine of €75,000.

Sexual offence against a minor

Created by the Act of 1 March 1994

Article 227-25: The act by an adult, without violence, coercion, threat or surprise, of sexually violating a minor of fifteen years of age is punishable by two years imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 francs.

- Amendment by the Act of 17 June 1998
Article 227-25: The act by an adult, without violence, coercion, threat or surprise, of sexually violating a minor of fifteen years of age is punishable by five years imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 francs.
- Amendment by the law of 1 January 2002
Article 227-25: The act by an adult, without violence, coercion, threat or surprise, of sexually abusing a minor under the age of fifteen is punishable by five years imprisonment and a fine of 75,000 euros.
- Amendment by the Act of 3 August 2018
Article 227-25: Except in the case of rape or any other sexual assault, sexual interference by an adult with a minor under the age of fifteen is punishable by seven years' imprisonment and a €100,000 fine.
- Amendment by the Act of 21 April 2021

Article 227-25: Except in cases of rape or sexual assault as provided for in section 3 of chapter II of this title, sexual assault by an adult on a minor under the age of fifteen is punishable by seven years imprisonment and a fine of €100,000.