



Safeguard Programme

GARDA VETTING CONSORTIUM
Overview and Guidelines

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Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium

The Safeguard Programme is an awareness-raising and capacity building programme which supports overseas development agencies to put structures and processes in place to protect children and vulnerable adults. In addition, as part of the programme, a facility has been put in place to enable participating agencies to vet volunteers.

The purpose of this document is to specifically outline the Garda Vetting Consortium of the Safeguard Programme.

A Garda Vetting Consortium operates on behalf of other organisations which do not have access to an Authorised Signatory within their own organisation or through another Consortium Group.

The Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium operates a vetting service on behalf of Irish based International Development Aid Agencies which send volunteers overseas.

What is Garda Vetting?

Garda Vetting is a procedure through which An Garda Síochána is asked, with a person's permission, to disclose any information held on police file.

Within current disclosure policy, details of all convictions and/or prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed, in the State or elsewhere as the case may be are disclosed to the authorised liaison person (the Authorised Signatory) in the registered organisation.

Garda Vetting is an important part of volunteer recruitment but should be seen as one part of a much wider process in making sure that a volunteer is suitable to work with children or vulnerable adults and should be undertaken alongside the following;

- Your organisation has a volunteer policy which is used
- Volunteers are asked to complete an application form
- Face to Face Interviews take place
- References are thoroughly checked and recorded
- Ongoing support, supervision and evaluation takes place

Background to Garda Vetting

A dedicated Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) was established in 2002 to deal exclusively with vetting. In 2006, it was significantly strengthened to facilitate the expansion of availability to meet the demands of vetting paid staff and volunteers across a wide range of sectors.

It is now considered *best practice* to have all volunteers who are working unsupervised with children and/or vulnerable adults (within Ireland or volunteering overseas having departed from Ireland) vetted through An Garda Síochána. This is a very straightforward procedure whereby the volunteer fills out an application form giving their permission to obtain a statement from the Garda Síochána as to whether there are any convictions against them or any prosecutions outstanding.

The person handling the applications must be an authorised signatory, which is someone who has had their background checked and has received formal training through the Central Garda Vetting Unit (CGVU), which includes making a commitment to maintaining confidentiality and professionalism with regard to this process.

Some Facts about Garda Vetting

The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides the only official vetting service in the Republic of Ireland

Local Garda Stations DO NOT provide vetting at a local level
See **Appendix I**
Garda Vetting v Police Certificates

Garda vetting is a centralised system. There is a Garda Vetting Form, which was designed by the GCVU. The GCVU will only deal with the authorised signatory.

The GCVU will process applications in relation to new & existing staff, relevant volunteers and students.

Garda vetting is one component of an overall recruitment and selection strategy.

Individuals cannot request Garda Vetting information from the GCVU. All applications must go through an organisation.

Vetting is not freely available – applications must be processed through an organisation that is already registered with the GCVU or another organisation which can act as an intermediary for a particular sector or group. (usually called a Vetting Consortium)

Information disclosed through the Garda Vetting process cannot be passed on to any other organisation or third party.

It takes approximately 4 weeks for the GCVU to process vetting forms. However, this may vary due to the following; volume of applicants, incorrect form completion, delay in sending forms from organisation to the GCVU etc....

Garda vetting is conducted in respect of personnel working in a full-time, part-time, and voluntary or student placement capacity in a position in a registered organisation, through which they have unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults

The Role of the Authorised Signatory

The authorised signatory of the Safeguard Programme is Volunteering Ireland's Programme Manager, Sarah Williams (hereinafter referred to as AS) who is registered with the GCVU.

Following training by the GCVU the AS is assigned a number and the signature of the AS is kept on a digital file at the GCVU. The AS provides the GCVU with a security password, which is confidential to the AS and is never disclosed to any other person.

Registration with the GCVU is predicated on the clear understanding that the AS will give an undertaking to comply with the Code of Practice on Garda Vetting in respect of all applications received by the AS and all data received from the GCVU.

Registration is further predicated upon the understanding that all data received from the GCVU in respect of any individual is for the sole use of the organisation the individual will be working in and that the AS gives an undertaking to manage and protect within the statutory provisions of the Data Protection Act (and any other legislation that may be enacted) in respect of data protection or Garda Vetting.

The GCVU has the right to revoke registration of the AS in the event of a failure and / or neglect to observe professional standards in respect of Garda Vetting procedures and data protection.

Process to engage with the Garda Vetting Consortium

If an organisation is interested in becoming part of the Garda Vetting Consortium, please contact Sarah Williams, Programme Manager with Volunteering Ireland.

Ensure that an individual within the organisation, who will be the liaison person with the Safeguard Programme, is identified. This person will be known as the Garda Vetting Contact Officer (GV Contact Officer).

A face to face meeting will take place, where the Vetting Policy (**Appendix 2**) and Agreement Form (**Appendix 3**) will be signed.

The GV Contact Officer will be issued with a Volunteering Ireland Garda Vetting Form, which can be photocopied and issued to volunteers.

Once the volunteers have completed their forms, they are gathered by the GV Contact Officer and sent in batches to the Safeguard Programme.

The Authorised Signatory will scan it for any omissions, mistakes or lack of clarity.

In the event of an incomplete form, the form is dated and returned with a cover letter for resubmission.

(Appendix 4 Appendix 5 Appendix 6)

The applicant's details are entered into the Safeguard Programme database by the AS. The Safeguard Programme strictly adheres to Data Protection legislation and confidentiality is mandatory.

The AS must sign each individual form.

The Completed Vetting Forms are then sent in Batches to the GCVU

The ideal number of applications per batch is 5 however smaller and larger batches can be sent if necessary.

Returned Applications from the GCVU

Once the GCVU return the forms, the AS will process the information received.

No conviction(s)

Where there are no conviction(s), the form will indicate the following:
"According to Garda records there are no previous convictions recorded against the above named applicant"

The GV Contact Officer will receive a phone call from the Safeguard Programme, letting them know that there was no information disclosed. This will always be followed up with a formal letter. (**Appendix 7**)

Conviction(s)

Where there are conviction(s) or pending prosecutions, the form will indicate
"the attached convictions appear on Garda Records"
OR "the attached prosecutions are pending"

Where this information is attached, the GV Contact Officer will be phoned by the Safeguard Programme, followed with a formal letter being issued, outlining the specific details of the disclosure. (**Appendix 8**)

Areas of consideration regarding Garda Vetting Forms

Regardless of the outcome of the Garda Vetting process, the decision to accept a volunteer into a programme is entirely within the organisation. The Safeguard Programme and the Authorised Signatory will not play any role in making such decisions. Volunteering Ireland will not be held accountable or responsible for any decisions made, but will however be available to think through any queries which may arise as a result of Vetting Disclosures.

Every applicant must be treated with care, respect and ultimately confidentiality. An organisation may accept and / or employ applicants who return convictions that are not considered to be related to child protection or violence and abuse of adults. Each disclosure should be dealt with in its own merit.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is mandatory. Any personal information relating to an applicant must be treated with the utmost care. Applicants must be treated with dignity and respect at all times

The Safeguard Programme is committed to protect the rights and privacy of individuals and is in compliance with the Data Protection Acts.

“The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 (the “Data Protection Acts”) lay down strict rules about the way in which personal data is collected, accessed, used and disclosed. The Data Protection Acts permit individuals to access their personal data on request, and gives individuals the right to have their personal data amended if found to be incorrect.”

Any data received from the Garda Central Vetting Unit via the Garda Vetting Consortium, in respect of any individual is for the sole use of the organisation submitting the Vetting Forms. All data disclosed must be managed and protected within the statutory provision of the Data Protection Act and any other legislation that may be enacted in respect of Data Protection.

Safeguard Programme

Garda Vetting v Police Certificates

Garda Vetting

The function of the Garda Central Vetting Unit is to disclose details regarding 'all prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed, and / or convictions' in respect of an individual applicant to a registered organisation.

The Garda Vetting Unit does not provide 'clearance' for persons to work with children, vulnerable adults or any other capacity in a registered organisation.

Can vetting be conducted on an individual basis?

No - Garda Vetting is conducted only on behalf of registered organisations and is not conducted for individual persons on a personal basis. Organisations seeking Garda Vetting for their employees, volunteers or students must register with the Garda Central Vetting Unit or have their applications processed through an organisation that is already registered with the Vetting Unit to act as an intermediary for a particular sector or group.

Who conducts Garda Vetting?

Garda Vetting is carried out by the Garda Central Vetting Unit which is based in Thurles, Co. Tipperary. Garda Vetting is not conducted by Gardai at local level

Police Certificate

The Gardai provide a statement of criminal convictions (or lack of them) to people in Ireland who need them for a range of reasons and this is a Police Certificate.

A police certificate is issued for the purposes of providing information to Foreign Consular Authorities in relation to obtaining a Foreign Visa, enabling a person to adopt or conduct business overseas. The information provided on a Police Certificate outlines whether or not a person has any convictions or not.

Who issues a Police Certificate? A Police Certificate is issued by the Superintendent in the District where the relevant applicant resides, or formerly resided, in the Republic of Ireland.

Is there a fee for a Police Certificate?

The certificate is issued free of charge.

For what purpose are Police Certificates issued? Police Certificates are issued for the following purposes:-

- Foreign Consular Authorities
- Foreign Visas
- Establishing a Business in other EU States

How do I apply for a Police Certificate? Applicants for Police Certificates for the above purposes should make an application in writing to the Superintendent in charge of the district where they live, or formerly resided, in the Republic of Ireland. Please go to the Garda [Station Directory](#) to find out who the District Superintendent is.

Are Police Certificates and Garda Vetting the same thing?

No, Police Certificate and Garda Vetting are two separate processes, providing different levels of information.

A Police Certificate yields limited information on convictions i.e. whether a person has ever been convicted of any crime or not.

Garda Vetting is the process to be undertaken for candidates wanting to work/volunteer with children or vulnerable adults. This process will disclose any convictions or prosecutions, pending or complete. A wider range of information is provided through the vetting process, enabling the potential employer to make an informed choice regarding the suitability or otherwise of the candidate.

So do I need to use both? It is up to each organisation to ensure that their volunteer recruitment, selection and management procedures address issues of child protection and serve to protect vulnerable adults overseas.

If a Police Certificate is required by the relevant Consular Authorities for entry into a country, then this must be applied for.

If a volunteer will be engaging with children or vulnerable adults during the course of their volunteer work, then best practice would be to also acquire Garda Vetting, which provides a much wider range of information.

Safeguard Programme

Garda Vetting Consortium - POLICY

The Garda Vetting Policy of the Safeguard Programme Vetting Consortium has been developed in order to clearly outline the following. Please keep this policy securely on file.

1. *Criteria for Garda Vetting Service*
2. *Data Protection*
3. *Storage and Access*
4. *Nominated Garda Vetting Contact Officer*
5. *General Procedures*
6. *Retention*
7. *Discontinuation of Service*
8. *Feedback*

1. Criteria for Garda Vetting Service

- 1.1. The Safeguard Programme will provide a service for voluntary organisations which send volunteers overseas to have access to Vetting information accessed through the Garda Central Vetting Unit. This service will only be provided to organisations and is not available to individual volunteers.
- 1.2. The Safeguard Programme will only provide this service for organisations that do not have access to an authorised signatory through their own organisation or through another consortium ie. National Youth Council of Ireland, a local Volunteer Centre, the HSE etc...
- 1.3. An initial meeting will be held with each group. The Safeguard Programme reserves the right to explore organisational structures in order to ascertain whether they may have access within their own structures to an authorised signatory.
- 1.4. All organisations wishing to access vetting must first be registered with The Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium.

2. Data Protection

- 2.1. The Safeguard Programme works with the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) to access information on any convictions or prosecutions pending or otherwise.
- 2.2. The Safeguard Programme complies fully with the GCVU code of practice regarding the secure storage, handling, use, retention and disposal of vetting disclosures and legal obligations under the Data Protection Act.
- 2.3. Copies of the Safeguard Programme Data Protection Policy are available on request.
- 2.4. Copies of the Safeguard Programme Access Request Policy are available on request.

3. Storage and Access

- 3.1. Completed Garda Vetting Application Forms are stored separately in lockable storage with access limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their work.
- 3.2. The Safeguard Programme will always keep completed Garda Vetting forms on file in the Volunteering Ireland Office. These forms will not be passed on to the voluntary organisation but the Safeguard Programme will share any relevant information with the nominated Garda Vetting Contact Officer within the voluntary organisation. The nominated contact officer can view the forms in the offices of Volunteering Ireland should they wish to do so.
- 3.3. A record will be maintained of all those to whom disclosed information has been revealed. It is prohibited to pass disclosed information to anyone other than the designated Contact Officer.
- 3.4. Where a volunteer has provided us with their personal data, they have a right to be given a copy of their personal data in accordance with section 4 of the Data Protection Acts subject to certain exceptions. The conditions on and procedures for making a request are outlined in the Safeguard Programme Access Request Policy, which is available upon request.
- 3.5. The Safeguard Programme will liaise with the contact officer immediately when the vetting information has been received from the Garda Central Vetting Unit. Contact may take

place over the phone, but **in all instances**, a formal letter will be received from the Safeguard Programme, detailing relevant disclosed information.

Note: The information provided in this will be the following;

According to Garda Records there are no convictions recorded against the named applicant **or** a statement of all convictions and /or prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed.

4. Nominated Garda Vetting Contact Officer

- 4.1. There must be one named person within the organisation to whom the Safeguard Programme will pass on relevant vetting information. This person is referred to as the Garda Vetting Contact Officer.
- 4.2. The nominated contact officer within the organisation must agree to participate in information and support sessions with the Safeguard Programme and read any updates / memos which the Safeguard Programme may share.
- 4.3. It is the responsibility of the contact officer to give their volunteers a Garda vetting Form (available from the Safeguard Programme) and to ensure that these forms are returned to the Safeguard Programme.

5. General procedures

- 5.1. Vetting forms will NEVER be returned directly to the Safeguard Programme by the volunteer but will be gathered by the contact officer and returned in batches or 5 or greater (where practical) to the Safeguard Programme.
- 5.2. It will always remain the responsibility of the organisation to decide whether a person is suitable for the position they are applying to work in.
- 5.3. All organisations must have a confidentiality policy in place internally to ensure that all information gathered in the vetting process is used in a correct and appropriate manner.

6. Retention

- 6.1. Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, the Vetting Forms will not be stored for longer than is necessary. It is the policy of the Safeguard Programme to keep this information on file for a period of 2 years.
- 6.2. After this 2 year storage time, the Safeguard Programme will ensure that any disclosed information is destroyed and while awaiting destruction, the information will be kept securely.

7. Discontinuation of Services

- 7.1. The Safeguard Programme reserves the right to discontinue this service.

8. Feedback

- 8.1. Constructive feedback on this Policy is always welcome. It must be given to the CEO of Volunteering Ireland who will ensure that the Safeguard Programme and the Board consider it



Safeguard Programme

Garda Vetting Consortium - AGREEMENT

I, the undersigned hereby make application to have _____ (organisation) included as a member of the Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium which will carry out vetting requests on our behalf with the Garda Central Vetting Unit.

**TO BE COMPLETED BY A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BOARD
or PERSON AUTHORISED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Signed: _____

Name in block capitals: _____

Position in organisation: _____

Organisation: _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE GARDA VETTING CONTACT OFFICER

Signed: _____

Name in block capitals: _____

Position in organisation: _____

Nominated by: _____

Organisation: _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Contact Officer e-mail _____

Password: _____

1. I (name) _____ hereby make application to be registered as the Garda Vetting Contact Officer on behalf of _____ (organisation), for the purpose of participating in the Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium.

2. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Safeguard Programme 'Garda Vetting Policy' and have read through this with a representative of Volunteering Ireland.

3. I agree to comply with the Garda Vetting Policy and I acknowledge that my organisation does not have access to Garda Vetting through any other consortium.

4. I will keep this policy securely on file and will ensure that it is made available to any colleagues engaged in the vetting process within my own organisation.

5. I understand that all information disclosed about any individual is for the sole use of my organisation. I further understand that all data received should be managed and protected within the statutory provision of the Data Protection Act and any other legislation that may be enacted in respect of Data Protection or Garda Vetting.

6. I understand that the Safeguard Programme within Volunteering Ireland will not make any decisions or recommendations about an individual's suitability to be involved with my organisation. Volunteering Ireland will not be held accountable or responsible for any decisions made. I know that the Safeguard Programme will support me with regards to best practice in Volunteer Recruitment and is available to explore any queries or concerns which may arise.

7. I understand that, in the event of my failure and/or neglect to observe professional standards around Garda Vetting procedures and Data Protection, the Safeguard Programme Garda Vetting Consortium and/or the Garda Central Vetting Unit have the right to revoke my registration as a Garda Vetting Contact Officer.

8. I declare that I have been authorised by my Organisation to be the Garda Vetting Contact Office. I will protect the confidentiality of my password

9. I understand that as the designated Garda Vetting Contact Officer that I must be Garda Vetted myself and will ensure that a completed vetting form is provided with my relevant information.

Signed: _____ Garda Vetting Contact Officer _____ Date

_____ Safeguard Unit Representative _____ Date

Sample letter for returning applications with omissions



Address
Address
Address
Address

Date

Incomplete Garda Vetting Form

Dear (GV Contact Officer)

Thank you for returning your batch of Garda Vetting Forms. This Batch was received today, (Day, Date and Month) and for future reference is Batch Number (insert batch number)

In order to process the Garda Vetting Forms, it is necessary for the forms to be completed fully and accurately. If these forms were to be sent to the Central Vetting Unit, they would be returned due to the reasons outlined on the 'Incomplete Garda Vetting Form' which has been completed for each relevant Applicant.

Please find enclosed the Vetting Forms for the following Applicant(s)

- Name(s)
-

I also include our 'Guidelines for Volunteers filling in Garda Vetting Forms' which can be shared with the relevant Applicants. This will hopefully help to ensure that the information provided is clear and accurate.

Please don't hesitate to contact me on 01 636 9446 should you have any questions.

Kind Regards

Sarah Williams
Programme Manager

Safeguard Programme

INCOMPLETE GARDA VETTING FORM

In order to process this Garda Vetting Form, it is necessary that the following details be completed by the Applicant and returned to you. It may be required that you issue the individual with a new blank Garda Vetting Form.

Name of Applicant _____



Surname

Forename

Please indicate if you have ever changed your name

Correct Date of Birth

All addresses from Birth stating Years From and Years to

Please indicate if you have ever been convicted of an offence in the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere and give relevant details

Declaration must be signed by Applicant

Writing on the Form must be clear and legible

Other _____



If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Williams,
Programme Manager on 01 636 9446



Safeguard Programme

Guidelines for Volunteers filling in Garda Vetting Forms

Please use BLOCK CAPITALS when completing the form. It is imperative that you complete the Garda Vetting Form fully and correctly.

Please note, forms will not be processed if handwriting is in any way illegible or if information is incomplete.

Field Name	Instructions
Surname	Insert your current surname.
Previous Name	Insert your previous name here (i.e. maiden name if applicable).
Forename	Insert your forename / first name.
Alias	If you are known by any name other than that/those on your birth certificate please insert here e.g. Anthony but known as Tony.
PPS Number	Please enter your PPS No. here (formerly your PRSI number)
Date of Birth	Insert your date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy).
Place / City of Origin	Insert the name of the city/town that you were born in.
Have you ever changed your name?	If yes, tick 'yes' box, if no, tick 'no' box.
If yes please state former name	Insert any previous surnames if applicable (e.g. in the event that you were married on more than one occasion or that you have changed your name by deed poll etc).
Please state all addresses from year of birth to present date	It is very important that your current address and all previous addresses, including all addresses abroad, are provided. You must also insert the years that you resided at these addresses, year from and year to. These will be checked and if there is any time unaccounted for, the form will be returned to you.
Have you ever been convicted of an offence in the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere?	If no, tick 'no' box. If yes, tick 'yes' box and then please provide details of conviction(s) ie. Date, Court, Offense, Court Outcome.
Declaration	Please make certain that you fill in the position you are applying for in the section marked: 'I the undersigned have applied to work as a "_____". You must read this declaration carefully, sign and date it, and also print your name in BLOCK CAPITALS underneath the signature.



Address
Address
Address
Address

Date

Garda Vetting Feedback – No Convictions / Prosecutions

Dear (GV Contact Officer)

I am writing to inform you that the Garda Central Vetting Unit has returned Batch Number (_____) to the Safeguard Programme. This Batch was received today, (Day, Date and Month)

I am delighted to inform you that according to Garda records, there are no previous convictions or pending prosecutions recorded against the below named applicant(s).

- Name(s)

Please don't hesitate to contact me on 01 636 9446 should you have any questions.

Kind Regards

Sarah Williams
Programme Manager

volunteering
ireland



Address
Address
Address
Address

Date

Garda Vetting Feedback – Convictions / Prosecutions Disclosure

Dear (GV Contact Officer)

I am writing to inform you that the Garda Central Vetting Unit has returned Batch Number (_____) to the Safeguard Programme. This Batch was received today, (Day, Date and Month)

Please note that according to Garda Records, there is a conviction / pending prosecution against the below named Applicant(s)

- Name(s)

Detailed below, you will find the specific information disclosed to the Safeguard Programme, against the named Applicant(s)

Please don't hesitate to contact me on 01 636 9446 should you have any questions.

Kind Regards

Sarah Williams
Programme Manager

Sarah Williams

Programme Manager

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