News

People walk outside the Cathedral of St. Peter and the Church of Our Lady in Trier, Germany,

People walk outside the Cathedral of St. Peter and the Church of Our Lady in Trier, Germany, May 15, 2020. An independent commission on the reappraisal of abuse in the Diocese of Trier presented its first interim report Aug. 25, 2022. (CNS photo/Julia Steinbrecht, KNA)



by Catholic News Service

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Trier, Germany — August 29, 2022

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The Diocese of Trier transferred alleged or convicted perpetrators of abuse to new locations in and outside the diocese, where they reoffended against young people and children, said an independent commission's interim report on abuse in the diocese from 1946 to 2021.

The German Catholic news agency KNA said the report's statistics showed 513 victims of abuse in the diocese's area of responsibility "could be identified by name or anonymously" for the period from 1946 to 2021.

"In a large number of cases at least ... no measures were taken on the part of the diocese to protect potential victims from sexual abuse," the commission said.

It said of the 513 victims it identified, 162 were female and 311 male. For 40 victims, information on gender was missing. The report listed 195 people as accused or convicted perpetrators of sexual abuse. The commission said the numbers were likely to increase as it delved deeper into the files.

KNA said the independent commission was launched in June 2021.

The commission, chaired by former Rhineland-Palatinate Justice Minister Gerhard Robbers, said that by mid-October, it would present a study on abuse during the era of the late Bishop Bernhard Stein, who headed the diocese from 1967 until his retirement in 1980. He is accused of having known about the sexual abuse of children by clerics and of having shielded the perpetrators.

The interim report also contains two serious historical cases that the commission said documented the "practice of diocesan administrations dealing with cases of sexual abuse internally and concealing them from the public, even from the access of state law enforcement agencies."

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Critics said the interim report omitted a case in which accusations of a breach of duty were made against the former bishop of Trier and current archbishop of Munich, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, and the current ordinary in Trier, Bishop Stephan Ackermann.

The commission told current diocesan officials it was "indispensable" that the current system of granting access to files to victims be "significantly improved." So far, this has been more like an "act of mercy," the commission said. It called for a "more transparent and less cumbersome procedure."

The commission also demanded that the diocese inform victims "regularly" and "more intensively" about the progress of the internal church proceedings launched in abuse investigations. "It is clearly evident that the situation of victims was given far too little attention in the internal church processing of the cases," the report said.

In addition, it said victims complained that the processing of their cases took a very long time. The commission called on the diocese to provide a long-term counseling and contact point for victims that stretched beyond the processing of their cases -- "either in the form of special pastoral care or through an independent ombudsman's office."

Ackermann, who has headed the diocese since 2009, said the commission had made the "first recommendations for action to the diocese" and that he would work to

implement them. He said the report gave "some suggestions for a stronger orientation toward victims -- I also understand it as a call for further professionalization on this entire issue."

Ackermann, who also serves as the abuse spokesman for the German bishops' conference, is expected to step down from that role in September.