

GUIDELINES FOR A LISTENING AND ACCOMPANIMENT SERVICE WITHIN SAFEGUARDING

1. Premise

"A process of reorientation of the life and of the activities of the Movement has been established whereby children and persons, in all their complexities, are at the centre of all care, protection as well as reparation and renewal processes." (Margaret Karram, 19 May 2022)

2. Purpose of these Guidelines

The purpose of these Guidelines is to present indications for implementing a **'listening and accompaniment service within safeguarding'**.

We have opted for the format of "guidelines" and not a "procedure" in order to maintain a function of guidance and not of legislation.

In this way, the document provides the basic elements necessary for each national or regional community of the Focolare Movement (FM) to develop an appropriate strategy for implementing the Guidelines for Listening and Accompaniment, taking into account geographical and cultural differences.

3. The Listening and Accompaniment Service in the context of Safeguarding in the FM

3.1 What it is

The Listening and Accompaniment Service within the context of safeguarding entails a relationship that is created with a person or a community that has been harmed or with any

person who feels they have been abused. It is set up to guarantee a service so that no one feels alone and to provide elements that respond to the specific need that has been identified. It is established with the aim of facilitating the accompaniment of all persons who turn to it for information and/or for a listening ear in the context of safeguarding and it concerns all kinds of abuse.

The person can request the “listening and accompaniment service” (individually or on behalf of the community) on a free and voluntary basis.

The requested service is carried out while respecting the anonymity of the person making the request and their privacy.

3.2 Who it is addressed to

It is addressed to:

Primary victims:

1. People (adults or minors, either individually or in a group) who consider that they have personally suffered abuse, of any kind: physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual, bullying, or abuse of authority or of conscience.
2. Abused people, after the conclusion of the internal proceedings following the ICC investigation, or any judicial or canonical proceedings.¹

Secondary victims:

1. people who have a link with the person abused: family, relatives, friends, etc.
2. people from the circle of the person accused, who may feel that they have been hurt, or are at fault and ask for help to overcome this painful experience
3. the entire local community (made up of its members who are secondary victims) because they are suffering from the abuse incident

Other people who define themselves as neither primary/direct victims nor secondary victims:

1. people who want information on the procedures and practices to be followed or on any topics related to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in the FM
2. people who wish to express their discomfort and suffering experienced within the FM, regarding the safeguarding of the individual

¹ The coordinator (of the ICC), with the help of the assistance team, will inform the person alleged to have been abused of the decision taken by the branch (in the forms mentioned in Art. 6.4.3.a)) and will provide information regarding the presence of listening services available to him/her even after the conclusion of the proceedings and regarding any process for compensation. *Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement art. 6.7.e*

3. people with a governing role and/or position in the government structures of the Movement who are dealing with situations of abuse in their communities and/or local areas.

Persons reported/accused as having committed abuse:

The person who has been blamed, because they are considered innocent until proven guilty.

3.3 How it works

The Listening and Accompaniment Service can be carried out through existing structures and/or people and resources within the FM (local Spaces of Listening and Accompaniment) or where there are external structures deemed suitable for this purpose.

Access to this service is a freely chosen and personal choice. This service starts only when the person wishes to do so. The person making the request may decide to terminate the listening and accompaniment service at any time. It is a free service for people who request to use it.

It starts with an initial meeting held by one or more persons who are skilled and/or trained in listening, in the field of safeguarding and helping relationships. They may also have medical, health care, psychological, psychiatric training or be professionals in the field of safeguarding of the individual, while avoiding conflicts of interest regarding their role and position within the MF for each situation. They may not be persons who currently hold, or have held in the last ten years, any governing role or position in the FM.

The 'purpose of the listening and accompaniment' in this first level of reception is **to create a bond of trust** between the person making the request and the person who is listening, so that they can find a safe space where they can experience closeness and proximity. All this while respecting the specific role of each one and the obligations of confidentiality of the case.

After the first conversations (1 to approximately 3 conversations), the Listening and Accompaniment Service may indicate, if requested by the person, professional support that will be provided outside the Space of Listening and Accompaniment.

The person may be referred to professional support for a more focused kind of help (of a psychological, therapeutic, legal, spiritual and/or other kind) by experts (psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, lawyers, spiritual counsellors, etc.) who are familiar with the procedures and the various prevention policies concerning the safeguarding of the individual of the FM. The person may, if he/she wishes, be provided with a list of experts with whom he/she can make contact.

Skills of the Person providing Professional Support

- The expert offers professional assistance to the person requesting it

- The expert must have a broad knowledge of the dynamics of trauma and its characteristics and consequences which are prevalent in a person who has been abused
- The person making the request may turn to people/resources or to the services identified in the network of their local area (private and/or public) or to external resources (Societies, Churches, etc.) or to people they trust
- The economic cost of the professional assistance from which the person may benefit will be covered in accordance with the provisions set out in the Guidelines of Support and Financial Compensation, exclusively in the cases expressly envisaged there.

3.4 The specific characteristics of the listening method offered by the Listening and Accompaniment Service

- it guarantees, at all times, a safe space that promotes trust for sincere communication of the emotions and experiences that have been lived and spoken about, without judgement
- it makes it possible to provide the necessary information so that the person has the elements to decide how to proceed in their process. If the need to make a report arises, the listener should promptly instruct the person abused to refer the matter to the relevant investigation commission (central, zonal or national) according to the Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the FM or to the legal and/or ecclesiastical authorities. If the person abused does not wish to make a report but a crime is found to have been committed, the listener will send the report to the relevant Commission without mentioning the name of the informant
- it guarantees confidentiality
- it does not use spiritual concepts to deny the facts or to downplay the situation of the person abused
- it is not meant to be a therapeutic purpose
- it helps to clarify what kind of specific accompaniment might be useful.

3.5 What the Listening and Accompaniment Service is not

- It is not the place where the investigation is carried out
- It is not a substitute for the legal or ecclesiastical authority in one's own country
- It is not a space for negotiations between the person abused and the offender
- It is not a space where an evaluation of the harm suffered is carried out

4. The Implementation in the Zones²

These Guidelines outline the general characteristics of a Listening and Accompaniment Service, which can be adapted to the different local settings of the FM in the world. The document takes into account the challenges posed by geographical and cultural diversity and local legislation.

Where possible, the service will be offered respecting local traditions and customs and integrating with the structures that have a key role in society, in the churches and in the culture of the area. The principle of subsidiarity will guide their implementation, enhancing the specific features and resources of each area or country.

Each Zone will study how to set up a Listening and Accompaniment Service where possible, considering the availability of local resources.

Respecting the clear distinction between the first level of listening and professional support, in the places/geographical areas where there are scarcities of resources and/or means to provide them, it is possible that the role of the Listening and Accompaniment Service can be carried out by at least two trusted people (teachers, social workers, respected people in society...) or by a group of people made up of trusted persons who are suitably trained, respecting the balance between men and women. It will always be possible to contact civil or ecclesiastical structures offering similar services, which are familiar with the field of Safeguarding, also in the FM, such as diocesan Listening Centres or other similar facilities.

It must be borne in mind that:

- it is always essential that one respects anonymity, the uniqueness of the case and/or of the relationship with the person making the request, the confidentiality of each process and of each individual who makes the request, avoiding, as already mentioned, a conflict of interest because of one's role or commitment in the FM
- if the resources of the geographical area do not allow for their own location, it is possible to hold the conversations in other places, respecting the criterion of independence and non-involvement of the government of the FM in the area
- if people's sensitivity is such that this is possible and the situation of the area require it (distances, languages, etc.), it is possible to hold the listening sessions online

² A *Zone* is defined as a geographical organisational division of the FM. A Zone may comprise part of or a whole country or several countries.

- for people who, for personal reasons, prefer to go to a Space of Listening and Accompaniment that is not in their own area, we will try to offer a Listening Space in other ways (online).
- in cases where the people involved, with regard to the reported facts, live in different countries, the person making the request is advised to arrange the Listening Space in their own area
- the people (at least two) who perform this role of listening and accompaniment must look after their own health (their psycho-physical well-being) in their service of listening

The zonal councillors for 'Nature and Physical Life' collaborate with the zone delegates of the FM for the implementation of these Guidelines. Those belonging to the FM should be informed of the contact details and the possibility to access this service. However, the fact remains that each Zone has full responsibility for managing this Service in the best possible way.

5. Approval and Duration

These Guidelines were approved on the 21st of February 2025 by the President of the FM, Margaret Karram, and the Co-President Jesús Morán after consultation with the General Council.

They will come into force on the 1st of March 2025. An evaluation of their effectiveness will be carried out in September 2026 after an 18-month implementation period, and any necessary additions or amendments will be made.

The Guidelines are published on the FM's international website and are circulated by the Communications Office and by those who are responsible for the FM in the zones.

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