

SAFEGUARDING IN THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

Annual report on activities
and data on cases
of sexual abuse of children
and vulnerable adults,
abuse of conscience,
spiritual abuse
and abuse of authority

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

Introduction: An Integral Conversion

4

2024: Listening, Formation, Regulation

6

Procedures for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement

9

Guidelines for a Listening and Accompaniment Service

11

Implementation of the Global Formation Process

16

Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

21

Reports of Abuse of Conscience, Spiritual Abuse and Abuse of Authority

INTRODUCTION: AN INTEGRAL CONVERSION

"Your work cannot be reduced to protocols to be applied, since it advocates for safeguarding through a formation that educates, measures that prevent, and listening that restores dignity. When you establish prevention policies, even in the remotest communities, you are making a promise: that every child, every vulnerable person, will find a safe environment in the ecclesial community. This is the driving force of what should be for us an integral conversion"¹.

We begin the 2024 Report on the activities of the Focolare Movement in regard to safeguarding with the words that Pope Francis addressed to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, in fact updating the mandate with which he constituted it 10 years ago.

We feel strongly called to fulfil this '*integral conversion*' to which the Holy Father appeals, which is never fully accomplished, but asks us to constantly question ourselves, to have a humble, always attentive, protective and welcoming gaze for each person. He asks us to continue with perseverance on the path of formation and authentic closeness, aware of the need for change, so that each person may feel safe, loved and respected in our environments and various activities.

¹ [Message of the Holy Father](#) to the participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, 25 March 2025

2024: LISTENING, FORMATION, REGULATION

From the point of view of safeguarding, the Focolare Movement has been characterised by three elements over the past year: **listening to and involving various people who have been abused and witnesses** in the processes of reparation and formation of those in positions of responsibility; **expanding courses and formation events** for all participants and **continuing to build the regulatory framework**, with the updating of the Procedures for handling cases of abuse and the drafting of the Guidelines for a listening and accompaniment service.

The **meeting of the Movement's delegates coming from around the world, that was held last November, with some people who had suffered sexual abuse or abuse of power by members of the Focolare Movement** was of fundamental importance. The people who had been abused told their stories of great suffering and the serious consequences for their lives and for the communities of which they were or still are part. Some family members of one of the abused people were also present and gave their testimony on the serious repercussions that abuse has on all members of the family. The words of one participant express well the importance of that moment: *"Listening to these people marked a before and an after. With delicacy and clarity, they expressed to us how much the Movement has failed in what is the heart of its charism: unity and love of neighbour, because in many cases we have not only been in some way co-responsible for the abuses committed, but we also left people alone to cope with their suffering."*

Furthermore, the contribution of the abused people, together with the involvement of professionals in various disciplines, external to the Movement, have been essential for the work carried out at the



2024: Listening, Formation, Regulation

International Centre and in the geographical areas for the **documents that have been produced this year and for the formation on safeguarding of the Focolare communities** in the world, as well as the planning and opening of some spaces for listening and accompaniment.

This year, a **Commission to study the abuses of power and spiritual abuses** that have occurred within the Movement was also set up. The aim is to investigate the causes, so that harmful practices can be changed and adequate prevention measures can be put in place. The study, which is still ongoing, also makes use of external advice from specialists in various fields: psychology, education and law. This analysis is supported and encouraged by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life and, although it is still in its initial stages, its great importance is recognised. It is clear that creating and applying rules and procedures is not enough, therefore it is necessary to study in depth the dynamics that have led to the different forms of abuse.

Finally, this year **regulatory documents and guidelines have been updated, implemented and produced** (as illustrated below). This is also the result of a fruitful collaboration with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which has followed and promoted the new steps taken.

PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING CASES OF ABUSE IN THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

Since the 1st of March 2025, the **new Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement** has entered into force, approved by the General Council of the Movement, by collective decision. Thirteen experts from different disciplines worked on it, updating and integrating the previous document approved in 2023 *ad experimentum*. The work of the technical committee began with 78 critical issues reported by the bodies set up by the Movement to handle cases of abuse, by members of the Movement in positions of responsibility, by some people who have been abused who encountered difficulties after reporting the abuse they had suffered, and also by some people who have been accused who encountered limitations in the procedures. Furthermore, the Procedures were studied by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which accompanied the Movement in this phase of the work with great willingness.

The purpose of the document is to regulate all activities carried out from the moment any person belonging to the Movement receives news or is told about any form of abuse: sexual abuse, abuse of authority, spiritual abuse or abuse of conscience.

The **new elements provided by this document** can be summarised as follows:

1. Greater attention given to the person abused

- Within the Independent Central Commission (ICC) a group of at least two people (professionals specialised in listening on the subject of abuse) will be set up to assist the alleged person abused throughout the internal process. From the moment the report is

Procedures for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement

made, it is important that the person who has had the courage to report, finds support and assistance and is kept constantly informed about the various stages of the process.

There will also be a person with this role in the zonal or national commissions.

- Reports of abuse will always be evaluated, even if the offence is time-barred according to civil or canonical law, and even if the accused person has died in the meantime. This is because the Movement intends to guarantee that each person abused is recognised for the harm suffered, in order to initiate a process of support and reparation. The Movement also wants to do everything possible to heal the wounds caused to the family and the community of the person abused, and to repair the scandal resulting from the abuse.

2. Distinction between sexual abuse and other types of abuse

- Within the Central Independent Commission there are two subcommittees with different specialisations: one is dedicated to sexual abuse, the other is dedicated to reports of abuse of authority, of conscience, of power and of spiritual abuse.
- The instructions given to those belonging to the Movement, when they receive a report of alleged abuse, are different depending on whether it is a case of sexual abuse or another type of offence (both when it is compulsory to report it to the authorities, and when it is reported to the Independent Central Commission), compared to other types of abuse, for which the service of listening and accompaniment is offered, where available.

3. Better definition of the process, the roles of the competent bodies and the people involved

- The process is no longer divided into two phases (preliminary and investigation phases) so as to streamline the whole process, reducing its duration and the number of people involved in the investigations.
- The Supervisory Board assesses whether the process and its duration are applied correctly; however, it does not constitute an appeal body regarding the evaluation of the facts.
- The Supervisory Board draws up an annual report of its activities, which is sent to the President of the Focolare Movement (FM), the Co-President and the Independent Central Commission and published on the Movement's website; the first report, relating to 2024, will be published by April 2025.
- The verification of the facts is reserved to the Independent Central Commission (or to the zonal or national commissions, according to their competence). Based on the verification, the sanctions are the responsibility of the branch to which the accused person belongs.

GUIDELINES FOR A LISTENING AND ACCOMPANIMENT SERVICE WITHIN SAFEGUARDING

Once the rules for handling cases of abuse in the Movement had been established, the need was recognised to offer listening and an accompaniment to people who have suffered any kind of abuse (primary victims); to families and communities that suffer because of these events (secondary victims) but also to the offenders of the abuse, so that each person has the opportunity to be accompanied in this process.

The Guidelines for a Listening and Accompaniment Service within Safeguarding therefore aim to offer basic elements with an orientation function to all the communities of the Focolare Movement throughout the world, encouraging them to create listening services, offered to those who desire it.

They were drawn up by a group of international professionals from Argentina, the Philippines, Germany, Italy, Kenya and Madagascar and are the result of a study and intercultural dialogue that involved not only specialists but also other consultants in the various geographical areas. The draft document was then examined by the General Council of the Focolare Movement and, finally, was approved '*ad experimentum*' until September 2026, by the President and Co-President.

Listening services in the local areas

This service is currently at its beginnings, as it is only active in Western Europe, specifically in the German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and in France. There are plans to promote it in other geographical areas. According to the Guidelines, the listening service in the local area should address not only the primary victims of abuse, but also the secondary victims and other people who want information on



Guidelines for a Listening and Accompaniment service

the practices, or those with roles of responsibility who ask for advice regarding conflicts that have occurred in the Movement. Persons reported as offenders of abuse (who are to be considered innocent until proven guilty) will also be able to access these services, as these are not interviews for investigative or evaluative purposes with respect to the cases or the damage suffered, nor are they a space for negotiation.

“Where does the support begin and end, and who provides it while respecting privacy?” This is the main question that the working group has tried to answer in order to set up the listening services. As a rule, one to three interviews are planned with people who are trained in Safeguarding, who are familiar with the Movement but are not necessarily part of it. This is a service offered on a voluntary basis, which does not provide professional support (for example psychological support), but merely suggests it. Preferably, these services are local, but the listening service could also be provided online. Following these conversations, the alleged person abused can decide whether to proceed with reporting the matter to the Independent Central Commission (ICC) or to the local commission and will be referred to specialists if they need particular support.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL FORMATION PROCESS

A special effort has been put into the **implementation of the formation process** outlined in the *Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults*, and aimed at all those belonging to the Focolare Movement.

This course is run by experts and professionals who work locally in the geographical areas where the Focolare communities are present, and to date has attracted participation and positive feedback from those who have attended the courses.

By way of example, we will share the **impressions of some people and communities who have undertaken the course** in different geographical areas:

- “I appreciated the quality of the course, which was very informative and well structured. The information I received on the different kinds of child abuse opened my eyes and I learned a lot, especially about observation, recognising the signs and how to offer support. It was a difficult but necessary topic, and I believe that this formation will greatly increase awareness and understanding.” (*Pakistan*)
- From *India* they write, “The first Safeguarding formation course held remotely was attended by 95 people from different cities: 33 from Bangalore, 28 from Mumbai, 21 from Goa and 13 from Delhi. ‘A new direction of thought’, ‘a courageous beginning in this new era we are living in’, ‘an open interaction, with a lot of spontaneity’ are among the expressions of the participants, whose impressions emphasise the importance of continuing to create awareness and to inform more people on this complex and fundamental issue.”

Implementation of the Global Formation Process

- Encouraging results are coming in from South-East Asia, despite the difficulty in finding experts who speak the many local languages. The basic courses on safeguarding have been held in Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, and have also opened up new paths for the study of other issues, such as those in the family environment: relationships between spouses and shared responsibility, relationships with their children, communication between men and women. It should be noted that in various Asian cultural contexts the protection of minors is a new topic and implementing measures will take time. The important thing is that the process has been started and that the communities are open to receiving formation.
- 'The formation course on Safeguarding in our countries is in its initial phase. We are sowing the first seeds. Now the seedlings need to be cultivated, even if in a complex context. Despite the difficulties related to distance and a culture that often struggles to find the language to address these issues, formation on Safeguarding helps break down barriers and taboos, stimulating constructive dialogue.' (Kenya)
- In *Benin* and *Togo*, members of the Movement with expertise in this field and from different cultural backgrounds have been identified and have taken on seriously the responsibility of the courses based on the Safeguarding Principles. They have worked remotely, offering a six-hour online formation course, divided into monthly meetings. Furthermore, aware of the technical difficulties – high costs, power failures, interference with other activities and inconsistent participation – they organised trips to the different local communities to address the topic in person. So far, seven meetings have been held, with the aim of doing more in 2025.



Implementation of the Global Formation Process

Collaborative formation

The Safeguarding formation is also fostering **greater collaboration with organisations in the Catholic Church**, such as in Honduras and Finland. In Brazil, for example, the Commission for the Safeguarding and Guarantee of the Fundamental Rights of Children, Adolescents and Vulnerable Adults (COPAC) has organised a free online course in Portuguese and Spanish entitled 'Protecting Childhood'. The Movement is promoting it in its communities with the aim that, by 2025, all those belonging to the Movement in Brazil will have completed the basic formation. The commission is also encouraging those from other Portuguese and Spanish-speaking countries to take advantage of this formation opportunity.

At the **International Centre of the Movement**, the work has focused on three main areas:

1. Creation of an intranet for sharing formation resources

A dedicated **intranet platform** has been developed, with access restricted to those responsible for the formation to enable the sharing of material produced by local teams or from other sources, across geographical and linguistic areas. This tool forms the technical basis for an international network of those responsible for the formation, coordinated by a commission, with the aim of developing and implementing common guidelines. Currently, the network has more than 200 formators in 50 countries.



Implementation of the Global Formation Process

2. Formation for the zone delegates of the Movement in Loppiano (Florence)

During the **annual meeting of the zone delegates of the Movement in Loppiano, two days of formation were held** for the General Council, the zone delegates of the Movement in the 15 geographical areas, as well as the councillors of the two Sections of the men and women focolarini, making up a total of 120 participants. An experiential and community approach was used, which allowed for reflection on 'service' leadership; on responsibility in the prevention, recognition and handling of abuse, also addressing aspects related to the history of the Movement regarding this issue. As already mentioned, one afternoon was dedicated to listening to the testimonies of people who had been abused within the Movement.

Critical issues in the Safeguarding formation process

However, this global Safeguarding formation process is not without its difficulties.

For example, from a documentary point of view, it has not yet been possible to organise a register of formation activities and the methods for archiving the documentation are still being defined.

There is also a need for support, advice and supervision whenever it is necessary to put the rules relating to safeguarding into practice. The



Implementation of the Global Formation Process

information learned in the basic courses needs to be experimented with and practised several times in order to acquire an increasingly solid preventive mentality.

In the coming years, these critical issues will be addressed, including encouraging the exchange of good practices and developing an impact assessment method. At present, the network of formators is being strengthened, and a more stable network is being created.

REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN OR VULNERABLE ADULTS

Key

The data reported in this Report concern:

- the status of reports received by the investigative commissions (i.e. the Independent Central Commission and the Independent National Commissions) during 2024
- the decisions made in 2024 regarding previously received reports.

In publishing the data on reports, the Movement recognises the suffering of the people abused/survivors who have had the courage to come forward and report what happened.

As indicated in the [Communication Policy of the Movement](#), the data presented is divided according to the country in which the abuses are alleged to have taken place and has been compiled according to the criteria established in the aforementioned document. They are listed in the order in which the report was received by the respective commission.

The term “dismissed” indicates a person belonging to the Focolare Movement expelled from the branch to which they belonged. The term “excluded”, on the other hand, indicates that the person is a part of the Movement, without specific commitments within it, and is forbidden to take part in its activities.

The term “other disciplinary measures” refers to measures, either temporary or without a deadline, that alter the way in which the person participates in the activities of the Movement. For example, they may be



Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

requested not to carry out activities in contact with children, or they may be prevented from taking on positions of responsibility.

The filed cases are those in which the internal process has been concluded without the existence of abuse being ascertained, for example due to lack of evidence or because the evidence presented does not allow for the presence of abuse to be demonstrated.

The "ongoing proceedings" may refer to different stages (see: [Procedures for handling cases of abuse in the Focolare Movement](#)), for example, they may indicate a state of pending judgement by the civil or canonical judge, or of ongoing investigations by the ICC, or awaiting a decision by the branch of the Movement to which the offender belongs .

The persons who abused (or alleged abusers) can be persons of any vocation in the Movement: consecrated, married, priests or lay people, people who belong to the branches of the Movement or adherents without a specific commitment, or, in some cases, people who do not belong to the Movement but have been accused of an abuse committed during an activity of the Movement, or in its environments.

The complete list of cases of sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults ascertained as such by the competent Commissions can be found on the Focolare Movement's website: <https://www.focolare.org/en/> under the heading: [Safe Spaces](#).

Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

Summary

Sexual abuse reports received in 2024: 11

Of which:

- 1 subject to disciplinary measures
- 10 ongoing proceedings

Reports pending as of 31 December 2023 concluded in 2024: 11

Of which:

- 3 closed with dismissals/exclusions from the Movement
- 5 subject to other disciplinary measures
- 3 closed and filed (the internal process has been concluded without the existence of abuse being ascertained)

Total ongoing proceedings (because they are awaiting a judicial or canonical decision, or because of ongoing internal proceedings) as of 31 December 2024: **20**

Total cases reported to the judicial authorities in 2024: **3** (the specific reasons are indicated below in the note).²

PEOPLE DISMISSED/EXCLUDED FROM THE MOVEMENT BECAUSE OF SEXUAL ABUSES IN 2024

² Out of a total of 11 reports received in 2024: 3 reports have been submitted to the civil/canonical authorities; for 1 report the person abused did not give consent; for 1 report the person abused is not known, and for 6 reports the proceedings are still ongoing.



Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

1. A.G., focolarino living in community, Italy
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
2. R.C., married focolarino, Brazil
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
3. P.J., priest focolarino, Czech Republic
Decade in which facts occurred: 2000
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES IN 2024

1. 2021.09, Brazil
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010
2. 2021.12, Switzerland
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010
3. 2022.01, Portugal
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010
4. 2022.06, Italy
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010



Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

5. 2022.15, Portugal

Decade in which facts occurred: 1990

6. 2023.03, Egypt

Period in which facts occurred: 2019-2022

REPORTS OF ABUSE OF CONSCIENCE, SPIRITUAL ABUSE AND ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

Key

The data reported in this report concern:

- the status of reports received by the investigative commissions (ICC, or Independent Central Commission, and independent national commissions) during 2024
- the decisions made in 2024 regarding previously received reports.

Here too, the “ongoing proceedings” may refer to different stages (see Procedures for handling the cases of abuse), for example: during the investigation by the ICC, or pending decision by the branch of the Movement to which the offender belongs.

The people who abused (or alleged abusers) can belong to any vocation in the Movement. The data of the reports are also indicated in the case of offenders who have died in the meantime.

Reports received in 2024: 8

Distribution of reports by geographical area:

- 3 Europe
- 5 America

Distribution of reports of the offenders by gender:

- 4 male
- 3 female
- 1 more than one offender of different genders



Reports of Abuse of Conscience, Spiritual Abuse and Abuse of Authority

Reports pending as of 31 December 2023 concluded in 2024: 20

Measures taken by the Focolare Movement:

- 2 subject to other disciplinary measures
- 18 closed and filed (the internal process has been concluded without the existence of abuse being ascertained)
- 23 ongoing proceedings

Rocca di Papa, 10 April 2025

By Stefania Tanesini, spokesperson for the Focolare Movement

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