



SAFEGUARDING POLICY OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

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Introduction

Unity is the fundamental core of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement¹ (hereafter FM), founded by Chiara Lubich (1920–2008) and now present throughout the world. The primary commitment of the FM is to guide people of every age, culture and social background towards living mutual love as taught by Jesus in the Gospel, thereby creating bonds of fraternal unity everywhere.

The FM strives to achieve its aims in a spirit of openness to dialogue and engagement in social and cultural fields. It firmly recognises the dignity and rights of every individual, actively promoting and safeguarding them, with particular attention to children, adolescents and vulnerable adults.

In order to ensure respect for persons and their rights, it has been and remains necessary to address possible cases of abuse of any kind and to establish regulatory documents that clearly define how to prevent and respond to such situations. The FM has therefore drawn up this policy which brings together the various existing procedures and guidelines, providing a general framework. Its purpose is to:

- define standards of behaviour for all those belonging to and for those participating in FM activities
- promote awareness, responsibility and transparency
- ensure compliance with current legislation and international standards
- offer practical guidance
- foster an organisational culture based on trust, security and respect

This document is intended for those belonging to the FM and for all those who collaborate with it. It aims to strengthen the awareness that it is the responsibility of each and every person to offer and ensure that all who take part in FM activities can do so in safe spaces that promote the well-being of every individual and guarantee an appropriate welcome and respect, that allows for meaningful experiences of personal growth.

¹ See <https://www.focolare.org/en/about-us/>

1. Statement of Values and Commitment

1.1 General Principles

- 1.1.1 The FM seeks to **respect every person in their unique condition, individuality and dignity**, in accordance with the biblical vision and the fundamental values of “natural law” upon which human rights are based. This respect leads to a commitment towards the safeguarding and well-being of every person. This is an essential dimension of its mission to help build, together with many others, a society renewed by Gospel-based love that generates fraternity.
- 1.1.2 The FM therefore undertakes **to ensure the protection, respect and value of every person**, with particular attention to children and adults in situations of vulnerability. It also fully recognises the principles set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 20th of November 1989.
- 1.1.3 This policy sets out **the fundamental principles and practical commitments** that guide our actions regarding safeguarding.

1.2 Our Values

- 1.2.1 **Dignity, equality and inclusion:** every person has intrinsic and inherent value that must be recognised and respected.
- 1.2.2 **Centring on the individual:** every individual is unique and irreplaceable and must be placed at the centre of every decision, intervention or action concerning them. When dealing with children and adolescents, every decision and action must be guided by the best interests of the child, ensuring respect for their individuality and potential.
- 1.2.3 **Listening and participation:** every person must be given the opportunity to express their needs, thoughts, emotions and opinions, and to be actively involved in decisions that affect them.
- 1.2.4 **Integrity and transparency:** it is essential to act with responsibility and transparency in all areas, ensuring the ethical management of resources and activities.
- 1.2.5 **Collaboration and solidarity:** teamwork and collaboration with families, local communities and other organisations are indispensable in strengthening networks of protection and support.

1.3 Our Commitment

Based on the values outlined above, the FM commits to:

- 1.3.1 **Creating safe spaces** in which everyone, particularly children and adults, in a position of vulnerability can fully develop their potential.
- 1.3.2 **Prevention and awareness-raising** - preventing all forms of abuse through raising awareness, continuous training/formation and practices that promote a culture of respect and shared responsibility, ensuring that all those involved in any activity have the knowledge and skills needed to recognise and prevent situations of risk or the violation of rules.
- 1.3.3 **A prompt and effective response** to address situations of risk swiftly and competently, ensuring support and protection, especially for children and adults in a position of vulnerability.
- 1.3.4 **Welcoming** for those who have suffered any form of abuse, also through setting up listening and accompaniment spaces.
- 1.3.5 **Support and reparation** - offering even a financial contribution for the healing process of children and vulnerable adults who have been sexually abused, where the FM bears responsibility.
- 1.3.6 **Fairness and access to justice** - ensuring that every person involved in a report of abuse has access to a fair and just process, to appropriate support and that their reputation is respected.
- 1.3.7 **Transparency** - implementing ongoing communication on safeguarding matters.
- 1.3.8 **Priority to those abused** - ensuring that, when there are the consequences of abuse, and while respecting the dignity of all involved, the first concern is the person who has been abused and their need for justice and support.
- 1.3.9 **Responsibility and continuous improvement** - monitoring and improving safeguarding practices, remaining open to new insights and adapting methods and processes to respond ever more effectively to emerging needs.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 General Safeguarding Responsibilities

Every person belonging to the FM has a responsibility to contribute to the physical, emotional and psychological **protection** of other people of the Movement and of participants in its activities, with particular attention to children. This responsibility entails:

- 2.1.1 Receiving **basic safeguarding training** in accordance with the [*Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults*](#), adapted to the cultural context in which activities take place.
- 2.1.2 **Respecting the laws** - civil and canonical, local, national and international laws - concerning the safeguarding of children.
- 2.1.3 **Actively engaging in the prevention** of abuse and violence, contributing to the setting up of safe and protected spaces.
- 2.1.4 **Promptly reporting** any suspicious behaviour or cases of abuse involving children, to the competent authorities, following internal procedures for handling reports of abuse.

2.2 Responsibilities of Those Working with Children and Young People

In addition to the responsibilities that are required of every person belonging to the FM, **those who work in close contact with children** in every part of the world where the Movement is present must comply with the following provisions:

- 2.2.1 Sign a **declaration** confirming the absence of any personal convictions or serious sanctions for any abuse and committing themselves to reject all forms of violence or abusive behaviour.
- 2.2.2 Receive **specific formation** appropriate to their role, which is periodically updated.
- 2.2.3 **Apply the established Code of Conduct** and follow the guidance provided for creating safe spaces.
- 2.2.4 **Work as a team**, ensuring mutual support among group leaders and facilitators of children, adolescents and young people, and, when necessary, seek the assistance of specialists in the field of education and development.
- 2.2.5 In cases where minors serve as "group leaders" for younger children, **obtain written consent of parents (or legal guardians) for this service** and ensure that such minors are accompanied by one or more adults. It must be remembered

that they are still regarded as minors and therefore fall under the provisions outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 of this policy.

2.3 Responsibilities of Those in Governance and Leadership Roles

2.3.1 Everyone within the FM in any **leadership** or governing role is required to:

- Sign a **declaration** confirming the absence of any convictions or serious sanctions for abuse and committing themselves to reject all forms of violence or abusive behaviour.
- Receive **specific training**, with a particular focus on exercising a role of responsibility.
- **Commit** to avoiding any form of abuse of authority, including spiritual or conscience-related abuse, in the carrying out of their role.

In addition, depending on their specific role:

2.3.2 The members of the central governing body of the FM (President, Co-President, and members of the General Council) are required to:

- lead or monitor formation and prevention activities
- appoint those responsible for internal procedures concerning the verification of abuse cases, as well as those tasked with monitoring the correct implementation of safeguarding measures
- **decide**, in accordance with the General Statutes and its Regulations, on the imposition of necessary disciplinary or precautionary measures towards persons accused of abuse.

2.3.3 The **zone delegates** are required to:

- lead or monitor formation and prevention activities within their own zone
- appoint members of the structures responsible to ascertain the facts of abuse cases at zonal and/or national level
- implement the necessary disciplinary and precautionary measures

2.3.4 **Local leadership** (including those responsible for the *zonette*, those responsible for local areas, and others such as local community coordinators or persons who have been expressly delegated to temporarily take responsibility for an activity or event) are required to:

- ensure that **all FM activities are organised and carried out in full compliance with the Code of Conduct** described below.

3. Code of Conduct

3.1 Premise

The FM requires that all those who belong to it, as well as those participating in activities it promotes, adhere to the following code of conduct. These guidelines outline the **attitudes and behaviour that everyone - from children to adults - is expected to uphold**, both in physical and digital environments. While recognising the wide cultural diversity and differing levels of awareness on these topics across geographical areas, these norms focus on the fundamental issues, to be adapted as appropriate to each context and culture. They are based on international standards that provide useful guidance and are already adopted by other movements, NGOs and similar organisations.

They include:

3.2 Good Practice

These are **established approaches or actions that promote protection and safety** during the Movement's activities:

- **welcoming**
- **active listening**
- **mutual respect**
- **clarity** regarding individual roles and responsibilities
- use of **appropriate language** (including on social media and other digital platforms)
- **respect for the person's dignity** in the publication of images
- **written consent** from both parents (or legal guardians) for participation in any event, and for the publication of the images, videos and personal stories of children and young people
- **use of open and/or visible spaces** for personal conversations with a child

3.3 Conduct to Avoid

This refers to behaviour which, whether intentional or not, may create **risky or unsafe situations** for both children and adults:

- **a single adult** being alone with a group of children and/or adolescents
- games or activities that make it **difficult to manage the group safely**
- **an adult travelling by car alone** with a child
- **expressions of affection that do not respect** the emotional sensitivity of children, according to local culture

- the presence of adults while children are using **toilets** and **showers** (except when a child cannot manage alone, and even then, it is advisable for two adults to be present)
- **administering medication** without parental (or legal guardians') consent
- use of **language** that could be offensive or discriminatory
- private meetings with a child or a vulnerable adult in **closed or non-accessible locations**

3.4 Unacceptable Conduct

This includes behaviour that has serious consequences or constitutes criminal offences and therefore **punishable by law**:

- **violent** physical behaviour
- behaviour, games or activities involving **physical contact with intimate parts** of the body
- any form of **inappropriate physical contact**
- physical **punishment** or psychological **coercion**
- use, distribution or permitted **drug** use
- use, distribution or permitted **alcohol consumption by minors**
- use, distribution or permitted use of **pornographic material**
- viewing and/or engaging in conversations of an inappropriate **sexual or discriminatory** nature
- actions **damaging to a person's reputation**, including the unlawful sharing of violent, discriminatory or sexually explicit images or videos (e.g. sexting, revenge porn, stalking, cyberstalking)
- **bullying and cyberbullying**

4. Creating Safe Spaces

4.1 General Principles

- 4.1.1 A “*safe space*” - particularly in relation to activities involving children, adolescents and vulnerable adults - refers to a **physical and social space that is carefully designed and managed** to ensure protection, inclusion, and suitability for the specific characteristics of the participants.
- 4.1.2 The creation of safe spaces, adapted to the specific contexts of the countries where the FM operates, represents a **fundamental tool for promoting care and well-being for each person**.
- 4.1.3 Experience shows that **collaborative planning** - engaging facilitators, communities, and children - provides an essential resource for overcoming individual limitations and developing more effective solutions.
- 4.1.4 This section of the Policy provides **an overview of key principles** designed to guide each community in reflecting upon and planning activities involving children.²

4.2 Criteria for Organising an Event

To ensure that the Movement’s activities take place in safe spaces and to minimise risks - particularly those concerning the safeguarding of children and adults in vulnerable situations - event organisers must ensure that the following general criteria are observed:

- 4.2.1 Carry out an **inspection of the premises** (indoors and outdoors) before use, in order to identify and prevent potential hazards.
- 4.2.2 Ensure the availability of a **first aid kit** and establish **emergency contact numbers** (e.g. doctors or nurses) in case of emergencies during activities.
- 4.2.3 Pay due attention to the **preparation of sports activities**, taking into account the age of the participants and any special needs.
- 4.2.4 **Avoid situations where one person supervises a training or educational activity.** When groups are large, increase the number of accompanying adults proportionally, in line with national legislation. In the absence of legal requirements, an adequate adult-to-participant ratio should still be maintained to minimise risk.
- 4.2.5 Obtain **written consent** signed by parents or legal guardians for the participation of children in any activities organised by the FM, including permission for the use of event photos. The consent form should be adapted

² For a more in-depth exploration of these concepts, please refer to the [Practical Guide to Creating Safe Spaces](#), where they are addressed in greater detail.

to comply with the regulations of each country. Even where not legally required, it is recommended to obtain written consent from both parents (or legal guardians).

- 4.2.6 Plan in advance how **communication with parents (or legal guardians)** will be managed in case of necessity.
- 4.2.7 Where possible, organise events so that parents (or legal guardians) or family members are responsible **for transporting children**. When this is not feasible, obtain specific authorisations and avoid situations where a lone adult provides transport.
- 4.2.8 For **overnight stays**, ensure that adults do not share rooms with children and ensure that separate spaces are provided for males and females.
- 4.2.9 In cases involving children who are not self-sufficient in **using toilets and showers**, agree in advance with parents or legal guardians what kind of help is needed, bearing in mind that, in this case, it is advisable for two adults to be present.
- 4.2.10 Consult local legislation regarding the obligation or advisability of taking out an **insurance policy**.

4.3 Criteria for Preparing Programme Content

Recognising cultural diversity and varying social contexts, the FM has established the following general principles for preparing programme content:

- 4.3.1 Acknowledge that the children and adolescents who are part of the FM are **active protagonists in their own formative journey**, taking into account their stage of development.
- 4.3.2 Inform parents or legal guardians in advance about the programme and planned activities, ensuring **transparency and clarity**. Where content involves the areas of affectivity or sexuality, their consent must be obtained.
- 4.3.3 Ensure that all materials and content **are consistent with the values** promoted by the FM and are **appropriate to the age** and needs of the participants.
- 4.3.4 **Integrate games in the educational process** for children, recognising it, not merely as a recreational moment but, as a key element of their holistic growth.
- 4.3.5 **Give time to get to know the group** so as to identify the specific characteristics and needs of each participant, ensuring an experience of personal and group growth appropriate for each one.

5. Care for Those who have Experienced Abuse

- 5.1 The FM reaffirms **the central importance of every person who has suffered any form of abuse**. In line with international standards, its safeguarding policy upholds that no form of abuse will ever be accepted, justified, or ignored, while ensuring the dignity and safety of every person.
- 5.2 The process of awareness and justice has been made possible **through the courage of those who have reported having been abused**. Disclosing abuse requires great strength and trust, and those who receive such testimonies must respond with sensitivity, empathy, and respect.
- 5.3 The FM is committed to ensuring that those **who have reported abuse are not left alone**, by accompanying them in their pursuit of justice and healing and respecting their right to anonymity.
- 5.4 Through the [*Guidelines for a Listening and Accompaniment Service within Safeguarding*](#), the FM works to ensure that each zone can develop **appropriate strategies to offer** personalised and voluntary **listening**, taking into account local and cultural characteristics.
- 5.5 While listening is essential, it does not replace **the need for professional support** by qualified experts who can provide the most appropriate help.
- 5.6 When, at the conclusion of an internal or external process, a case of sexual abuse against a child or a vulnerable adult within the context of the FM's activities is confirmed, **the person affected may access support** as provided for in the [*Guidelines on Support and Financial Reparation of the FM*](#). Requests may be submitted in writing to riparazione.mdf@focolare.org.

6. Competent Bodies for Safeguarding in the Focolare Movement

The FM has established **specific competent bodies dedicated to safeguarding** and to the handling of abuse reports.

6.1 Independent Central Commission

- 6.1.1 It is composed of both internal and external members of the FM appointed by the President. Internal members may not be holders of positions of responsibility within the FM.
- 6.1.2 In accordance with the Procedure for the Handling of Cases of Abuse in the FM, it directly handles reports of abuse involving members of the General Council, men and women **focolarini, clerics, members of religious orders, consecrated women and any lay people** subject to canonical proceedings in cases of sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults. It also handles all reports of abuse occurring in countries where there is no zonal or national commission.
- 6.1.3 It **coordinates the activities of the zonal and national commissions**.
- 6.1.4 It **is autonomous and independent** from all governing bodies of the FM in its assessment of facts. It is accountable only to the Supervisory Board with regard to compliance with the processes established by the above-mentioned Procedure and its own internal regulations.
- 6.1.5 **Contact e-mail:** abusereport.foc@gmail.com and abusereport.foc@pec.it

6.2 Independent Zonal and/or National Commissions

- 6.2.1 Members are **appointed by the Zone Delegates** and may not be holders of positions of responsibility within the FM.
- 6.2.2 They handle, in accordance with the same Procedure, reports of abuse cases concerning **persons not falling under the competence of the Independent Central Commission**.

6.3 Supervisory Board

- 6.3.1 Composed of at least five members, all external to the FM, appointed by the President.
- 6.3.2 It verifies **the proper application of procedures** by the Independent Central Commission and the independent zonal and national commissions.
- 6.3.3 It **ensures** that the FM **is compliant with this Policy**, providing recommendations where necessary.
- 6.3.4 **Contact e-mail:** supervisoryboard.cobetu@gmail.com

6.4 International Commission for Formation

- 6.4.1 Composed of at least three people from different geographical areas, appointed by the President of the FM.
- 6.4.2 **It serves the zones and the International Centre** in implementing the global formation strategy of the FM, promoting the sharing of materials, experiences, and good practices among the different areas, and facilitating the production of formation material.
- 6.4.3 It facilitates **connections with experts and resources**.
- 6.4.4 It ensures **regular meetings** with national or zonal representatives.
- 6.4.5 It **prepares an annual summary report** of the FM's safeguarding-related formation activities, based on statistical data, zonal reports, and collected feedback.
- 6.4.6 **Contact e-mail:** formazione.tutela@focolare.org

6.5 Safeguarding Office

- 6.5.1 An office within the International Centre of the FM.
- 6.5.2 Its role is to link and harmonise the activities of the various internal competent bodies and services dealing with safeguarding, coordinate periodic reports on safeguarding activities within the FM, and monitor compliance with commitments and deadlines.
- 6.5.3 It supports the President and Co-President in fulfilling their institutional safeguarding responsibilities and maintains contact with the specific competent bodies involved in safeguarding.
- 6.5.4 It maintains contact with individuals or organisations wishing to communicate with the FM on safeguarding matters, directing them to the appropriate competent bodies.
- 6.5.5 It is supported by a "*Consultation and Action Working Group*", composed of representatives of governing bodies of the FM and other experts.
- 6.5.6 **Contact e-mail:** ufficio.tutela@focolare.org

7. Reports of Abuse and the Response of the Focolare Movement

7.1 Premise

- 7.1.1 **Any form of abuse can have devastating consequences** for the person who suffers it. Many types of abuse are considered crimes under the laws of individual states and under canon law. In particular, sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults constitutes a serious crime. Therefore, the FM considers it essential to report every offence to the competent authorities.
- 7.1.2 The FM also is committed **to listen** to anyone who reports any kind of abuse that has taken place within the context of its activities, even if such abuse is not considered a crime under civil or canon law, or when legal proceedings are no longer possible. This may occur, for example, when the statute of limitations has expired, as those who have suffered abuse often become aware of what happened and find the courage to report it only after many years.
- 7.1.3 **The reporting of abuse is regulated** by the [*Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement*](#)

7.2 Procedures for Reporting Sexual Abuse

- 7.2.1 Anyone within the FM who **receives a spontaneous disclosure** from a person claiming to have suffered sexual abuse, or other forms of abuse that constitute a criminal offence, must:
 - **listen** attentively, exercising particular care when the person is a minor, without asking leading questions or applying any pressure, allowing the person to recount their experience freely
 - remain as **calm** and natural as possible, remembering that the person has chosen to speak about the alleged abuse because of trust
 - **if the person is a minor**, encourage them to inform their parents or guardians of what has happened, unless the alleged person who has abused is one of the parents or guardians, or such disclosure could expose the minor to further risk
 - invite the person, or their parents or guardians in the case of a minor, **to contact immediately the judicial authorities and the competent commission** to handle the specific case, in accordance with the practical competence rules described in section 7.3 below.
- 7.2.2 **Any person belonging to the FM who is aware of facts or information**, whether directly or indirectly, suggesting a possible abuse has a duty both of confidentiality and of reporting to the competent commission for the handling

of the specific case, following the practical competence rules described in section 7.3 below. Even if the alleged person abused does not wish to make a report and requests anonymity, the report must still be made, ensuring that anonymity is preserved - meaning that no identifying details of the alleged person abused or others involved (except the accused person) are disclosed - and respecting the duty of confidentiality.

- 7.2.3 The person of the FM who receives the disclosure must under no circumstances conduct any personal investigation but must immediately **submit the report** in accordance with the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#). Anyone violating this obligation will however be held accountable.
- 7.2.4 Where required by national law, the obligation to make an independent report or complaint **to the competent judicial authority, or to the local Ordinary** where the incident occurred, always remains valid. **Each person belonging to the FM can also do so independently.**

7.3 Procedures for Reporting Other Types of Abuse

- 7.3.1 Anyone within the FM who receives **a spontaneous disclosure from a person claiming to be a victim** of spiritual abuse, abuse of authority, of conscience or of power must immediately refer them to one of the listening and accompaniment services, where available.
- 7.3.2 The listening and accompaniment service provides the opportunity to establish a relationship of trust with qualified professionals, in **a safe and confidential environment**, allowing emotions and experiences to be expressed and shared respectfully, without judgement. This ensures careful and respectful listening, enabling the provision of information that helps each person make informed decisions regarding their own journey.
- 7.3.3 The service is available to primary or secondary victims of abuse; to those seeking information about the FM safeguarding procedures; to anyone wishing to express concern or discomfort about such matters; to those in positions of responsibility who must deal with such cases; as well as to people who have been accused. This service provides a space for support, welcome and guidance, while respecting the dignity of every individual.
- 7.3.4 If, for any reason, it is advisable to make an immediate report, **the person may be referred to the competent commission.**

7.4 Identification of the Competent Commission

- 7.4.1 **The Independent Central Commission (ICC)** is responsible for cases in which the accused person is:

- a member of the FM General Council
- a man or woman *focolarino*, whether living in community or married, including during the period of formation
- a priest *focolarino* or volunteer
- A permanent deacon, *focolarino* or volunteer
- a member of a religious order of the branch of men religious or a consecrated person of the branch of consecrated women
- a layperson subject to canonical disciplinary proceedings³
- a cleric, a member of a religious order or a consecrated person, even if not belonging to the FM, for acts committed during participation in FM activities

7.4.2 The **Independent Zonal and/or National Commissions** handle cases where the accused person does not fall into any of the categories listed above. If no national commission exists in the country where the events occurred, competence lies with the relevant zonal commission (according to the FM's subdivisions of the geographical areas of the zones). In the absence of a zonal commission, competence lies with the ICC, which may make use of local experts, as regulated by the [Procedure](#) for Handling Cases of Abuse.

7.4.3 **If the person reporting is unsure as to** which is the competent commission, they may contact the ICC at: abusereport.foc@gmail.com.

7.5 The Focolare Movement's Response to Reports

7.5.1 The competent bodies (see above) conduct an **internal disciplinary procedure** in order to:

- verify the reported facts and inform the person who suffered the abuse
- provide elements necessary for supportive action for that person

7.5.2 **This process is regulated** by the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).

7.5.3 The outcome of the investigation, expressed in a reasoned opinion by the Independent Commission, is then **transmitted to the branch to which the alleged abuser belongs**, which will adopt appropriate measures in proportion to the seriousness of the case.

7.5.4 The FM will take care **to protect those who report abuse** from any retaliation or intimidation by the person accused. Anyone who believes they have suffered intimidation or retaliation may make a confidential report to the President, who

³ The identification of which profiles of those belonging to the FM fall under this provision is currently being studied.

will assess how to intervene. This can be done without prejudice to other measures provided for by civil law.

- 7.5.5 **The person who has abused bears personal responsibility for their actions**, which may cause serious harm not only to those who have been abused but also to the entire FM community. The FM is committed to acting decisively to prevent further abuse, informing civil or ecclesiastical authorities as required by law and by internal procedures, and applying disciplinary sanctions.
- 7.5.6 The FM undertakes not to abandon the person who has abused but, once appropriate measures have been taken to protect the community, to ensure **that the person is accompanied on a path of assuming responsibility** and, if desired, psychological treatment and spiritual support. In the most serious cases, the person will no longer be permitted to participate in FM activities or community life. Where the person who has abused is dismissed from the section of the men or women *focolarini*, the person responsible for the section is not obliged to provide financial support. However, in cases of need, as specified in the relevant regulations, the person responsible for the section shall act with a spirit of charity and, according to the section's means, offer fraternal assistance deemed appropriate to the individual's circumstances.

8. Selection and Training of Collaborators within the Focolare Movement

- 8.1 When selecting **suitable adults to collaborate in various capacities (whether voluntary or paid), within FM Centres, affiliated projects, or its activities**, it is essential to ensure that they receive appropriate formation regarding the FM's safeguarding policies. This principle applies especially to those responsible for the formation and accompaniment of minors. Good intentions alone are not sufficient: it is essential that every adult is aware of and respects the codes of conduct adopted by the FM.
- 8.2 **Adults who regularly accompany children or hold positions of responsibility** must have no convictions or pending charges for abuse. In countries where it is required, a police certificate confirming the absence of such charges is mandatory. Where such documentation is not foreseen by law, a personal declaration signed by the individual concerned is required.
- 8.3 Adults who collaborate or work in various capacities (whether voluntary or paid), within FM Centres, affiliated projects, or its activities, where their duties involve being present **in places where children stay overnight**, must have no convictions or pending charges for abuse. In countries where this is required, a police certificate confirming the absence of such charges is mandatory. Where such documentation is not foreseen by law, a personal declaration signed by the individual concerned is required.
- 8.4 The assessment of adults' suitability **involves the participation of their local community**, which knows these people personally and observes their interactions. The community plays a co-responsible role in safeguarding both adults and children. A vigilant community environment helps early identification of potentially problematic situations and promotes proactive communication about ambiguous or inappropriate behaviour.
- 8.5 With regard to formation activities, it is recommended **to prioritise the creation of teams** for the accompaniment of children rather than assigning such responsibilities to individuals. Teamwork provides valuable organisational and preventive support. Working as a team facilitates the planning of formative activities and allows mutual oversight of behaviour, thereby reducing the risk of inappropriate situations.
- 8.6 Periodic evaluations of the performance of FM collaborators in various capacities, must include **verification of compliance with this Policy**, with particular attention to those who hold responsibility for others and those involved in the formation and accompaniment of children.

9. Safeguarding Formation

- 9.1 Safeguarding formation is a **fundamental resource** for promoting rights, fostering respectful relationships, encouraging collective responsibility, and ensuring an adequate preparation for the prevention of abuse. This process takes place within a framework of integral and continuous formation.
- 9.2 **Basic formation in safeguarding** children and vulnerable adults is mandatory for all those who belong to the FM.
- 9.3 To this end, the FM has published the [*Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults*](#), available on the official website.
- 9.4 These *Guidelines* are implemented by local groups, which may be supported, when necessary, by the International Formation Commission. These groups are responsible for identifying the most appropriate formation model for the social and cultural context in which they operate, promoting specific and targeted prevention strategies.
- 9.5 Within the FM, safeguarding formation is **structured across different levels**, defined according to the degree of responsibility held and the extent of contact with children. The aim is to ensure that each person, according to their role and functions, receives adequate preparation to contribute towards the protection and well-being of children and vulnerable adults.
- 9.6 **Formation courses differ**, for example, for those who take part in activities in general, those who support activities for children, those who accompany children on an ongoing basis, and those who hold coordination or supervisory responsibilities within the FM. Specific formation is also provided for those serving on commissions or groups dedicated to safeguarding.
- 9.7 This modular structure enables **an effective and targeted response to the needs of each role**, fostering a shared and responsible culture of safeguarding.
- 9.8 For further details, see the [*Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults*](#).

10. Information and Communication

10.1 The FM is committed **to ensuring communication that promotes the comprehensive safeguarding** of every person belonging to the FM or who participates in its activities, guaranteeing transparency and accessibility of information while respecting the privacy and dignity of each individual, in accordance with the laws of the various countries.

10.2 To ensure a structured and clear management of information, **the FM has adopted a Communication Policy** which defines the procedures and timing of public communication concerning:

- actions, undertaken or in progress, in safeguarding
- the appointment of members designated to the bodies responsible for safeguarding within the FM
- dismissals and other measures taken against those belonging to the FM who were found responsible for sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults
- the annual report summarising the safeguarding work carried out by the FM, the Independent Central Commission, and the Supervisory Body

10.3 The annual reports and other official communications **are published on the FM's official website** in the section dedicated to safeguarding.

11. Safeguarding Documents Published by the Focolare Movement

Each of the documents listed below is subject to periodic review and updates. Anyone may send comments, observations, concerns, or proposals for amendments to the Safeguarding Office.

- [Practical Guide for Creating Safe Spaces](#)

A document providing practical guidance for ensuring safe spaces in FM activities and facilities.

- [Communication Policy](#)

Procedures and timelines for public communication regarding activities, undertaken or in progress, in safeguarding.

- [Guidelines for Support and Financial Reparation in Cases of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults](#)

Guidance developed by the FM for support and financial reparation for children and vulnerable adults who have been sexually abused. From 2023 they have been implemented in various countries, and these will be progressively updated with criteria allowing for a personalised approach to individual situations, in accordance with the local laws of each country.

- [Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults](#)

A formation strategy structured at different levels, with general guidance to be adapted to local social and cultural contexts.

- [Guidelines for a Listening and Accompaniment Service within Safeguarding](#)

Core elements to enable each FM community, whether national or of a specific geographical area, to develop an appropriate strategy for listening to and accompanying those who have experienced abuse or who seek clarification on the topic, taking into account local and cultural differences.

- [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#)

A document describing the procedures to be followed and the competent bodies to be contacted when there are reports regarding any form of abuse, which has occurred during activities organised by the FM. This is valid whether or not the accused person belongs to the FM.

12. Glossary

Abuse: Any improper act or behaviour that involves psychological or physical violence, carried out with the intention of dominating another person to achieve one's own goal. (For further details, see the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).)

Abuse of authority: The improper use of power or a position of responsibility, occurring whenever a person, exceeding their authority or competence, acts beyond the limits established by law, by the General Statutes or by the regulations. (For further details, see the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).)

Abuse of conscience: Occurs when an individual's conscience - the seat of free and personal judgement - is controlled, manipulated or replaced, so that the person believes they are acting freely and correctly, while in fact they are acting according to the manipulator's interests or guidance. (See the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).)

Annual report: In this document, it refers to the report summarising the activities carried out each year by the FM regarding safeguarding.

Assistants / Youth leaders: Individuals responsible for supporting and accompanying children, adolescents or young people within the FM in their formation.

Basic formation: In this document, it refers to the initial educational course on safeguarding, mandatory for all those belonging to the FM.

Branch of Consecrated Women: The branch of the FM made up of consecrated women belonging to various institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, who have embraced the Movement's spirituality of unity.

Branch of Men Religious: The branch of the FM made up of consecrated men belonging to various institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, who have embraced the Movement's spirituality of unity.

Bullying: Repeated, inappropriate and overbearing behaviour towards an individual or group, expressed through actions intended to intimidate, exclude, humiliate or isolate. (For further information see the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).)

Code of conduct: Behavioural rules regarding safeguarding that all those belonging to the FM must observe, as set out in this policy.

Community: Within the FM, this term refers to the group of people in a given area, belonging to different branches, who work together in common activities inspired by the Movement's charism.

Councillors for Nature and Physical Life: This term refers to the two General Councillors elected by the General Assembly as well as the councillors in each zone, who are responsible for matters concerning nature, environmental care, human life in all its stages, and the physical and spiritual well-being of persons.

Cyberbullying: A form of bullying carried out through digital means such as social media, chats or email, with the intention of offending, threatening or humiliating someone.

Cyberstalking: Repeated online persecution or harassment aimed at intimidating or controlling a person.

Discrimination: Unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group based on personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, religion, health, political beliefs or sexual orientation.

Focolarino priest or deacon: A focolarino who has been ordained a priest or deacon. They continue living in a "focolare" and being members of the Section of the men focolarini, while being incardinated in a diocese.

General Council of the Focolare Movement: The central governing body of the FM, composed of the general councillors elected by the Assembly, those responsible for the various branches of the Movement and other members appointed by the President in accordance with the General Statutes. It gives consent on matters as provided for in the General Statutes and suggests initiatives concerning the whole Movement or several of its branches.

General Statutes: The official normative document, composed in accordance with canon law and approved by the Holy See, which defines the purposes, norms of life and governance of the FM, ensuring the unity of the movement organised in various branches.

Government of the Focolare Movement: The set of bodies that direct and coordinate the Movement. According to the General Statutes, *"The organs of the central government of the Focolare Movement are the General Assembly, the Central Governing Body of the Work of Mary and the General Council."* Peripheral governing bodies include the Zone Delegates, the Zone Councils and those responsible for each "zonetta" or geographical area.

Internal procedure: In this document, it refers to a disciplinary or administrative process carried out within the Movement.

International Centre of the Focolare Movement: Refers to the headquarters of the FM in Rocca di Papa (Rome, Italy), where the general governing bodies of the Movement operate, as well as all the offices and services that assist them.

International centres: Central structures that coordinate the FM's activities. The term may refer to the International Centre of the Movement or to the centres of its various branches, initiatives and activities, most of which are located in Rocca di Papa (Rome, Italy).

Lay person subject to canonical proceedings: A member of the Catholic Church who is not a cleric, member of a religious order or consecrated person, but who through their task "enjoy dignity or perform an office or function in the Church" and are therefore subject to the rules of canon law regarding sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults (see can. 1398 §2). The identification of which of these profiles in those belonging to the FM fall under this provision is currently being studied.

Listening and accompaniment service: A service provided by the FM (either directly or in cooperation with other organisations), managed by professionals with expertise in safeguarding and/or with medical, psychological or psychiatric training.

Man or woman focolarino living in community: Member of the Section of the men or women focolarini who lives in a "focolare" community and has dedicated their life to God through their choice of living the evangelical counsels with private vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

Married man or woman focolarino: A married member of the Section of the men and women focolarini who dedicate their life to God according to their state. They belong to a focolare community even if not residing there, and they make a choice to live the evangelical councils through private promises of chastity, poverty and obedience.

Minor: A person who has not yet reached the age of majority, which in most countries is 18.

Offence / Crime: An act or omission which is prohibited by criminal law and punishable by law.

Privacy: The right of every individual to the protection of their personal data and the confidentiality of their information.

Period of limitation: The time limit established by law within which a person must assert their rights or initiate legal action. Once this period has expired, the right can no longer be exercised or pursued juridically.

Permanent deacon focolarino: An ordained permanent deacon incardinated in a diocese, belonging to the branch of priests and permanent deacons focolarini of the FM, living its spirit and being part of a "priests focolare".

Permanent deacon volunteer: An ordained permanent deacon incardinated in a diocese, belonging to the branch of priests and permanent deacons volunteers of the FM and living its spirit.

Persons external to the Focolare Movement: In this document, it refers to individuals who are neither part of the branches nor adherents of the FM.

Priest focolarino: An ordained priest incardinated in a diocese who belongs to the branch of priests and permanent deacons focolarini of the FM, living its spirit and being part of a "priests focolare".

Priest volunteer: A priest incardinated in a diocese who belongs to the branch of priests and permanent deacons who are volunteers of the FM, living its spirit.

Ramifications: The different structural groupings of the FM, known as sections, branches or movements. Each branch has its own leaders and regulations approved by the General Assembly. They are made up of people who are part of the FM with varying degrees of belonging, rights and duties

Regulation: In this document, it refers to the fact that each branch follows a set of rules approved by the General Assembly of the FM. These rules define the rights and duties of those belonging to the branch and they must be observed.

Revenge porn: The non-consensual sharing of intimate or sexually explicit images or videos with the intent to humiliate or take revenge on a person.

Sexting: The exchange of sexual images or videos through smartphones or computers. While not necessarily illegal (if consensual and respecting privacy), it is considered socially inappropriate and definitely risky behaviour.

Sexual abuse: Any unlawful act involving sexual behaviour committed without free and informed consent, or by exploiting a position of authority or trust, violating the dignity and psycho-physical integrity of the person. (See the [*Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement*](#).)

Specific formation for youth leaders: Formation courses designed for those who support, accompany or educate children and young people.

Spiritual abuse: Any kind of relational manipulation, using religious or spiritual topics, aimed at dominating or controlling another person, violating their inner freedom and compromising their relationship with God or their own inner world of values and beliefs. (See the [Procedure for Handling Cases of Abuse in the Focolare Movement](#).)

Stalking: A pattern of obsessive, repeated and intrusive behaviour towards a person, such as harassment, repeated messages or phone calls, or surveillance, etc. The stalker creates conditions which “forces” a person to enter a relationship, causing anxiety or fear in them.

Vulnerable adult: In this document, this term refers to an adult who is at greater risk of suffering abuse. Since no universal definition exists, the concepts expressed in the documents [Vos estis lux mundi](#), art. 1 §2(b), and the [Guidelines of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors](#) apply. This may include a person who is ill, disabled, elderly, has experienced abuse in the past, is in a situation of power imbalance or faces any other difficulty or adverse condition that makes it difficult, even temporarily, to protect themselves from abuse.

Work of Mary: The official name by which the FM was approved by the Holy See. The General Statutes refer to it as the *Work of Mary* or *Focolare Movement*.

Zone: A geographical subdivision of the FM established by the President of the FM with the consent of the General Council. It may include one or more countries and is organised according to the General Statutes. Each zone has two people who are responsible - a male and a female zone delegate. Within each zone there are smaller geographical divisions of the FM known as the “zonette” and, at times, the “areas”. (See *General Statutes*, art. 115.)

Zone delegates: A man and a woman, both focolarini living in their respective communities, appointed by the President as those responsible for the FM within a specific geographical area known as a “zone”.

13. Contacts

To report an abuse: abusereport.foc@gmail.com

To submit proposals for amendments to this Policy or to any of the documents listed in Section 11, or to request information regarding their content or the official website of the FM: ufficio.tutela@focolare.org

To contact the Supervisory Board: supervisoryboard.cobetu@gmail.com

For requests regarding financial reparation in cases of sexual abuse involving children or vulnerable adults: riparazione.mdf@focolare.org

For information about safeguarding formation courses: formazione.tutela@focolare.org

14. Approval

This Policy was approved on 21 November 2025 by the General Council of the Focolare Movement.

It enters into force on 1 January 2026.

This Policy is published on the official international website of the Movement and is widely distributed by the Communications Office and the Zone Delegates of the FM.