

# SAFEGUARDING OF THE PERSON 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

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# INTRODUCTION: “PROTECT, LISTEN, HEAL”

For the second year, the Focolare Movement (FM) is publishing a report on the activities it has implemented to safeguard the person and data on cases of abuse reported within the Movement.

This document aims to highlight the new steps implemented in 2023 in order to communicate them to people belonging to the Movement, to the general public and to institutions.

In 2023, the Movement focused its work in this area, enlightened by the [words](#)<sup>1</sup> of guidance that Pope Francis addressed to the participants at the first National Meeting of the Services and Territorial Listening Centres for the safeguarding of children and the most vulnerable adults, promoted by the Italian Bishops' Conference.

The Pope encouraged the participants to act according to three guidelines: “*protect, listen and heal*”, in order to implement an integral protection of the person. On that occasion, the Holy Father specified that: “*our communities must be a healthy provocation for society, in their capacity to take responsibility for the mistakes of the past and to open up new pathways*”.

To achieve a fuller awareness of this and to implement formation courses, the Movement has published the “[Guidelines for formation in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults](#)”, which regulate the compulsory basic courses which should take place for all those who belong to the Movement, for the leaders and for teachers in contact with children.

In addition, “[The Focolare Movement's Communication Policy concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults](#)” has been approved and published. In this, the Focolare Movement defines its communication policy on the subject. The Policy indicates the ways in which communications are made public.

Of particular note is the chapter on the different forms of publication regarding the identity of the people who have committed abuse. This deals with the criteria by which the Focolare Movement publishes information about individuals who have been dismissed or subjected to disciplinary measures for sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults or against whom judicial or internal proceedings are under way, to ascertain the abuse and the consequent responsibilities.

The creation of a *Policy* on such a sensitive topic as the safeguarding of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/november/documents/20231118-incontro-tutelaminori.html>



## Introduction: “Protect, listen, heal”

children and/or vulnerable adults was urgent and essential. Communicators and legal experts have worked together to draw up practical norms to regulate the circulation of information and to strike a balance between a commitment to transparency and the protection of a person’s privacy according to different national legislations. A balance which is not easy to identify, but one that the Focolare will continue to seek in order to always prioritise the centrality of the person, without fear of admitting errors and being able to correct them.

Since the publication of this report, data relating to reports of sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults are compiled according to the rules set out in the [Communication Policy](#), in the section: “Different forms of publication according to the person’s identity”, which outlines the criteria guiding the publication of the names of people who abused or alleged abusers, as explained in the above document: ‘in compliance with the laws in force in the countries where the abuse occurred ... and specifically the need for the protection of people who have been abused, prevention of new abuse and transparency’. As this is the first report published according to the criteria set out in the Communication Policy, it has been decided to list all reported cases from 2014 to the present, highlighting all those reported in 2023.

Also included are summaries of reports of abuse of conscience, spiritual abuse and abuse of authority.

Finally, the Movement is also addressing other aspects of safeguarding, aware that it is at the beginning of a journey to guarantee a listening ear, justice and information especially for those who have been abused, but not just for them.

For this reason, an interdisciplinary and intercultural study group composed of experts has been set up to produce guidelines for listening to and accompanying those who have been abused, the communities involved and the people responsible for the abuse.

Moreover, to ensure prompt and effective investigations following reports of abuse, two new members of the Independent Central Commission have been appointed as of 1st January 2024, and their [names](#) are published on the Focolare website.

# PRESENTATION OF THE “GUIDELINES FOR FORMATION IN THE SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

At the end of November 2023, the Focolare Movement published the [Guidelines for Formation in Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults](#), which is available on the Focolare website.

This document aims to respond to the Movement’s commitment to make it compulsory for all the people belonging to the Focolare Movement worldwide, to attend at least one basic course on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

## **There are five different levels of formation:**

- for all adults belonging to the Movement, those who work in its structures, including parents, who are not members of the FM, whose children participate in its activities.
- for people who collaborate occasionally, support staff for children’s activities; young people and adults who are staying in the little towns of the Focolare for a period of more than two weeks.
- for those who continuously accompany children (assistants, catechists, etc.).
- for members of the Independent National Commissions, for the national contact persons for Safeguarding, for teams dedicated to training and the Councillors for Nature and Physical Life of the Zones<sup>2</sup> and of the International Centres.
- for people with responsibilities for the FM in the zones, members of the General Council and collaborators at the International Centres.

In addition, formation material for children and adolescents is being prepared, as well as abuse prevention activities within the family. These are being developed by the New Families Movement, a branch of the FM.

Basic formation courses for the promotion of the welfare and safeguarding of children are run by people belonging to the Movement with expertise related to the subject, in cooperation with the local Safeguarding Formation

<sup>2</sup> A “zone” is a regional organisational division of the Focolare Movement. A zone can include a part of or an entire country or several countries. The “zonette” and their territories are a further organisational and geographical subdivision of the Movement.



## Presentation of the “Guidelines for Formation in the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable adults

Commissions. Very often, at a local level, external contributions are made by other bodies, such as local churches, competent civil associations and other experts.

The Guidelines are the result of a process of in-depth study and community discernment carried out by an international study group composed of experts from various disciplines, such as educators, psychologists, psychiatrists and lawyers.

The Guidelines will be implemented by local teams supported by the Coordination of an International Commission. The local teams (national or regional) will choose the formation model that best suits their social and cultural needs. We opted for the formula of ‘guidelines’ and not a ‘protocol’ (with binding and exclusive legal or pedagogical indications), in order to maintain its role as a guide. In this way, the document offers the necessary basic elements so that each national or regional community of the Movement can develop an adequate formation strategy which, considering their cultural elements, is channelled towards the prevention and eradication of any kind of abuse, both within the Movement and within work, neighbourhood or school environments where there are people belonging to the Movement.

Moreover, we have worked to develop the current network of formators on safeguarding within the Movement. This is already happening in the 15 geographical areas in which the Focolare Movement is divided throughout the world. The aim is to enable all those of the Focolare Movement to receive basic training in the safeguarding of children by the 31st March 2025.

# PRESENTATION OF THE “THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT’S COMMUNICATION POLICY CONCERNING SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS”

*“... continue to spread further light on the scourge of abuse in order to eradicate this profound evil; continue to promote transparency, to restore dignity and hope to survivors of abuse, and guarantee the well-being of all God’s children.”<sup>3</sup>*

Pope Francis’ clear indication to the Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican also sheds a great light on those who want to make a decisive change of direction in favour of transparency and truth. First of all, this is true for those who have suffered abuse, then also for the communities and this is in order to purify and rediscover the authentic evangelical and charismatic spirit.

This is why it was essential that the Focolare Movement should also have a [Communication Policy](#) concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

The Communication Policy indicates the ways in which communications are made public, respecting the privacy of those who have been abused and of the people who abused or alleged abusers, always taking into account the laws of the different countries where the events took place.

The *Policy* clearly states that the Movement is committed to:

- making public the formation activities on safeguarding; any information regarding the bodies set up for safeguarding within the Focolare; the dismissals and other measures taken against members of the FM who are considered responsible for the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults; and finally, the report that includes the Movement’s work on safeguarding;
- guaranteeing communication that promotes the integral safeguarding of every person who participates in the activities of the FM through continuous communication that acts as a preventive measure; supporting formation activities; guaranteeing the transparency and accessibility of information; encouraging the awareness of all members of the FM with regard to the need to report sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults to the competent bodies; facilitating the disclosure of information concerning the dismissal of the abuser and/or any measures taken to accompany those who have been abused in their pursuit of justice.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, message to Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican – 18 April 2023



## Presentation of the “The Focolare Movement’s Communication Policy concerning sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults”

The chapter on the [different methods of publication concerning the identity of the offender](#) is important. These are the criteria according to which the FM publishes information on individuals who have been dismissed or subjected to disciplinary measures for sexual abuse of children or vulnerable adults, or against whom judicial or internal proceedings are in progress so as to ascertain the abuse and the consequent responsibility.

At every stage of the investigation, the Focolare Movement is committed to implementing measures for vigilant supervision within its environments and meetings, particularly when children are present.



# REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN OR VULNERABLE ADULTS

## Key

The referrals in this report were received by the investigation commissions (ICC, i.e. Independent Central Commission, and formerly COBETU, Commission for Welfare and Safeguarding, and OTP Body for the Safeguarding of the Person) from 2014 to 31st December 2023.

Each referral is the result of a courageous and significant choice made by someone who has been abused.

The data presented in this section are broken down according to the country where the abuse allegedly occurred and have been compiled according to the criteria set out in the [Communication Policy](#). Therefore, for the reasons stated in the Policy, names are often replaced by the initials of the first and last name, or by a numerical code assigned by the ICC.

Cases are listed in the order in which the referral was received by the Investigation Committee.

The term “dismissed” indicates a person belonging to the Focolare Movement expelled from the branch to which they belonged and from the entire Movement.

The term “excluded”, on the other hand, indicates that the person is part of the Movement, without specific commitments within it, and is forbidden to take part in its activities.

The term ‘other disciplinary measures’ means measures, either temporary or without a deadline, that alter the way in which the person participates in the activities of the Movement. They may, for example, be requested not to carry out activities in contact with children, or they may be prevented from taking on positions of responsibility.

‘Ongoing proceedings’ may refer to different stages (see investigation protocol), e.g. they may indicate a state of pending judgement by a judge, or ongoing investigations by the ICC, or awaiting a decision by the branch of the FM to which they belong.

The person who abused (or alleged abuser) 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 of the Movement without a specific commitment, or in some cases, people who do not belong to the Movement but have committed an abuse during an activity of the Movement. The details of the people who abused are given, even if they are now deceased.

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### Summary

#### **TOTAL OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE ABUSED/ALLEGED ABUSERS: 74**

Measures taken by the Focolare Movement:

- 29 dismissed from the Focolare Movement by resignation or other measure (see list according to countries)
- 11 subject to other disciplinary measures
- 22 pending (because they are awaiting a judicial or canonical decision, or because of ongoing internal proceedings; see list according to countries)
- 12 closed (cases for which it has been established that there are insufficient grounds to proceed with the investigation)

#### **Sexual abuse reports received in 2023: 10<sup>4</sup>**

Of which:

- 2 concluded
- 8 ongoing proceedings
- 3 reported to the judicial authorities<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In last year's Report we mentioned 66 people who committed abuses. The discrepancy of the total is due to an error in a previous calculation.

<sup>5</sup> The new "Procedures for Handling Cases of Abuse" stipulates that all reports received from 1st May 2023 onwards (when the new procedures came into force) must be reported to the competent judicial authority, even if the offence is statute-barred, unlike under the previous procedures.

There may be exceptions: for instance, if the victim refuses to report and the law does not impose an obligation to report; or because the fact does not constitute an offence under local law. It should be noted that the concept of abuse of vulnerable adults, adopted by the FM Procedures, in accordance with the requirements of canon law, is broader than that provided for in the criminal laws of several countries of the world.

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### ➤ ARGENTINA

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED/REMOVED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. 2017.04  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Removed from FM activities following internal proceedings
2. C.C., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1970-1979 (Argentina); see also  
Colombia  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
3. C.S., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1970-1979  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

#### PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

4. 2022.04  
Decade in which facts occurred: 2020
5. 2022.08  
Decades in which facts occurred: 1970-1989
6. 2022.16  
Decade in which facts occurred: 2010-2019

PROCESS IN PROGRESS: 1

### ➤ AUSTRALIA

#### PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

1. 2019.02  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1990-1999

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### ➤ BRAZIL

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED/REMOVED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. J.I., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
2. A.M., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
3. E.S., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
4. O.D., volunteer  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
5. Joao da Silva, member of New Families  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Removed from the Focolare Movement following criminal conviction
6. H.O., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Deceased. Internal investigation established the likelihood of the facts

#### PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

7. 2014.01  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1990-1999

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS:      3

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### ➤ CAMEROON

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. A.M., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

### ➤ COLOMBIA

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. C.C., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2000-2009 (Colombia); see also  
Argentina  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

### ➤ IVORY COAST

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 1

### ➤ KOREA

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. P.K., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

### ➤ EGYPT

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 1

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### ➤ FRANCE

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. Jean-Michel Merlin, focolarino living in community  
Period in which abuses occurred: 1961 to 2005  
Civil judgement, dismissed from the branch
2. 2019.03, married focolarino  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
3. G.G., volunteer  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1980-1989  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
4. Eric Audouard, volunteer deacon  
Period in which the abuses occurred: 2006-2012  
Criminal conviction, dismissed from the branch

### ➤ GERMANY

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. B.N., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1970-1979  
Deceased, dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 1

### ➤ ITALY

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. S.P., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1980-1989  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

2. R.S., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
3. A.S., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2000-2009  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
4. S.C., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2000-2009  
Resigned from the branch following internal proceedings. In court non-definitive sentence of acquittal.
5. A.T., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
6. J.E., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2000-2009  
Resigned from the branch following internal proceedings
7. A.P., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1990-1999  
Dismissed from the branch prior to internal proceedings
8. A.D.B., focolarino living in community  
Decades in which abuses occurred: 1970-1989  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
9. A.R., focolarino living in community  
Period in which the abuses occurred: 1978 to 2003  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

### PEOPLE SUBJECT TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

1. 2020.06  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1990-1999
2. 2021.08  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1970-1979

## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

3. 2022.07  
Decade in which facts occurred: 2020

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 7

### ➤ **LEBANON**

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. R.T., focolarino living in community  
Decades in which abuses occurred: 1970-1989  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings

#### PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

2. 2018.07  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2000 -2009

### ➤ **MEXICO**

#### PEOPLE SUBJECT TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

1. 2017.03  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1990-1999

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 2

### ➤ **PORTUGAL**

ONGOING PROCEEDINGS: 1

### ➤ **CZECH REPUBLIC**

ONGOING PROCEEDINGS: 1



## Reports of Sexual Abuse of Children or Vulnerable Adults

### ➤ **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

ONGOING PROCEEDINGS: 2

### ➤ **SPAIN**

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. A.C., Focolarino priest  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 1980-1989  
Dismissed from the branch following internal proceedings
2. E.C., Focolarino living in community  
Period in which the abuses occurred: 1998-2002  
Resigned from the branch following internal proceedings

### ➤ **UNITED STATES**

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 1

### ➤ **SWITZERLAND**

#### PEOPLE DISMISSED FROM THE MOVEMENT

1. R.S., focolarino living in community  
Decade in which abuses occurred: 2010-2019  
Dismissed from the branch following criminal conviction

#### PEOPLE SUBJECTED TO OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

2. 2016.02  
Decade in which facts occurred: 1980-1989  
Deceased

PROCEEDINGS IN PROGRESS: 1

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

## Key

The reports below were received by the Commissions of Investigation (ICC, previously COBETU and OTP) from 2014 to 31st December 2023.

Here too, 'ongoing proceedings' may refer to different stages (see investigation protocol), e.g. during the investigation by the ICC, or pending decision by the relevant branch of the FM.

The people who abused (or alleged abusers), can belong to any vocation in the Movement. The expression 'groups of people who have abused' refers to cases where the accusation of abuse is not against a single person, but against several people, a group or a community. The details of the people who abused are given, even if they are now deceased.

## TOTAL REPORTS: 46

### Reports received in 2023: 22<sup>6</sup>

Measures taken by the Focolare Movement:

- 8 closed (cases for which it was established that there were insufficient grounds to proceed with the investigation)
- 3 subject to disciplinary measures
- 35 pending

Gender breakdown of people who abused subjected to restrictions or pending cases:

- 5 men
- 17 women
- 16 groups of people who abused

Distribution of reports by geographical area:

- 24 Europe
- 11 Americas
- 2 Africa
- 1 Asia/Oceania

<sup>6</sup> In last year's Report we mentioned 22 cases. The discrepancy of the total is due to an error in a previous calculation.



**Rocca di Papa, 1st March 2024**

**By Stefania Tanesini, spokesperson for the Focolare Movement**

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