Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Francis poses for a photo with members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, in Rome for their plenary assembly, during a meeting at the Vatican March 7, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js



Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — March 12, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The pope's commission for advancing the Catholic Church's efforts to prevent the abuse of vulnerable persons is due to submit its first annual report on the state of safeguarding in the church.

In a statement dated March 8 and sent to reporters March 11, the commission said it had approved the submission of its "pilot annual report" on safeguarding policies and procedures to Pope Francis, who had requested a report from the group in April 2022.

While focused particularly on safeguarding policies and procedures in the 13 countries whose bishops made their "ad limina" visits to Rome in 2023 and engaged with the commission staff as part of those visits, the report also offers an assessment of the trends at a regional level, pointing to areas for improvement and it offers recommendations.

The commission's annual report will offer "recommendations on how to move forward in achieving the goals of truth, justice, reparation" and to prevent child sex abuse in the church. A section of the report will also review how various departments of the Roman Curia engage the local church in safeguarding, the statement said.

Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, president of the commission, told participants at the assembly that the report was expected to be released this summer.

The commission also announced in its March 8 statement the approval of a study group "to examine the reality of vulnerable persons in the context of the Church's ministry and how this informs safeguarding efforts."

The goal of the study group is to "adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to the questions around vulnerability to provide concrete recommendations on how the Church might better combat the harms committed against non-minors by the Church's ministers in a variety of pastoral settings," the statement added. It will present its findings in a report and offer a set of recommendations.

Advertisement

While the Catholic law meant to prevent clerical sexual abuse has listed "vulnerable adults" as a special category in need of protection, questions have been raised about whether those persons should always be treated in church procedures in a way equivalent to children under the age of 18. For example, many asked, is a religious sister vulnerable to a priest who is her spiritual adviser in the same way that a person with a developmental disability would be.

In early October, Patricia Espinosa Hernández, a member of the pontifical commission and a psychiatrist and psychotherapist, wrote to women who had said they were victims of Slovenian Father Marko Rupnik, a well-known artist. The commission, Espinosa told them, wanted to hear about how they had been treated during the various phases of the church's investigation of the former Jesuit priest.

The commission's statement also spoke of a "universal guidelines framework," which they planned to release "very soon," and which aims to "set a benchmark against which the Church can assess safeguarding capacity, measure weakness and set targets for improvement." the statement said.

The commission had launched an online survey in June 2023 open to anyone interested in giving feedback on the proposed framework's application to local churches.

Pope Francis had met with the commission on the final day of their plenary assembly March 7 and said that despite discouragement the church's safeguarding efforts "must not wane."