

TWO COUNTRIES, SAME FEAR: WHEN WOMEN DIE DUE TO PATHOLOGICAL LOVE

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Abstract: *Violence is nothing more than the intentional use of physical force by people with the aim of causing harm to other living beings or to material goods that manifests itself through injury, pain, disability, damage, death. The World Health Organization shows that violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power - threatened or actual - against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in physical harm, death, psychological suffering, impaired development or deprivation" (World Health Organization, 2015). It follows from this definition that violence is not limited to obvious physical aggression. It includes subtle and systemic forms of exercising power. Violence causes psychological trauma, economic inequality and/or social marginalization. Intention is the essential element, the fundamental distinction between an act of violence and an accidental event lies in the will or conscious acceptance of the risk that harm may be caused. Even in the absence of immediate bodily harm, violence has serious consequences, lasting consequences on physical, mental and social health (Krug et al., 2002).*

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Introduction

Violence has been written about, is being written about, and will continue to be written about in the future. What could be the reason? Are we not learning anything from all the violence we see around us? Is the legislation neither sufficient nor effective? Is the education we received at home, at school, in society wrong, misexplained, misunderstood? The questions are many, we could fill hundreds of pages with questions alone. Some have answers, some don't. Violence is a major problem in today's society. It can take various forms: physical, psychological, sexual, economic (Morozan, 2014:181), etc. The Romanian civil legislation sanctions with nullity any legal paperwork that was agreed upon under physical and psychical that is directed at one of the contracting parties or someone close to them such as a husband, a wife, any ascendants or descendants.

Violence against women and girls has become a global problem. Domestic violence has become the most common form of violence faced by women and girls, and statistics show that the percentages are increasing year by year. Although legislation has become stricter, there are policies and programs that help women in this type of situation. Romanian NGOs complain that public authorities in Romania do not have an integrated system for collecting data on

domestic violence or the forms that violence against women takes, making the scale of the phenomenon very difficult to monitor.

We must also mention that the phenomenon is underreported, which makes estimating the real number of cases extremely difficult. Not all women have the courage to report the violence they endure. Some out of fear, some don't trust that the authorities will help them, some because they feel ashamed of going through such experiences, or for many other reasons.

There is information that more educated women, with above-average salaries, report domestic violence situations much less frequently so as not to affect their personal prestige.

It is true that the decision to report a case of domestic violence is very difficult, but victims should consider that it is about personal safety, the safety of children, who may also be in a situation of risk.

Romania

The press in the country and abroad make us aware of "hard" cases, cases that are shocking due to the way they operate or because of the women who are victims of violence and that arouse in us a range of feelings, from sadness, pity, horror, to revolt, and more.

One such case shook the entire country. The case of Teodora Marcu, the 23-year-old woman who was shot while holding a child and was pregnant. Another femicide.

Murdered by her ex-boyfriend. This is how this young woman who had her whole life ahead of her met her end.

The details of the crime are outrageous and deeply disturbing.

The problems and questions in this case are many. How is it possible for a young woman to be murdered in broad daylight on the street? Where did her ex-boyfriend get the weapons? Why didn't the authorities anticipate the danger this young woman was in, who had repeatedly complained that she was afraid of this individual, that she feared for her life? Why didn't the authorities follow the profile of the murderer?

The authorities announced that in this case, in 2021, a protection order was issued in the name of the aggressor for a period of 4 months, an order that was supervised by the Bacău Police, which did not find any violation of this order during the aforementioned period.

The victim later moved from Bacău, perhaps to escape the constant harassment she was subjected to. The Ilfov District Court, where the young woman had her new address, did not register any complaint regarding those involved, nor was a protection order issued.

Experts point out that the problem in Romania is not the lack of legislation, but the way the law is applied. It is about the lack of specialists, specialists who understand the victim, who know how to relate to them.

Unfortunately, most of the time, women who ask the authorities for help are treated superficially, and the representatives of the authorities, those who should understand them, empathize with them, and come to their aid, lack empathy and respect.

More sad and worrying is the fact that comments have appeared online that show that the victim is being blamed. Some reactions are downright shocking in their cruelty. Today we are witnessing a desensitization at the level of society. There are people who are completely devoid of empathy. Comments such as: "I've saved the world from a prostitute before", "she wasn't a good girl", "who knows what she did, maybe karma", etc. The young woman was also criticized for having a relationship with the aggressor who was much older than her. We notice

that the social reaction is directed towards blaming the victim. The victim thus becomes responsible for the abuse she was subjected to, she is guilty of what happened to her because the actions and decisions she took or the way she reacted in her relationship with the aggressor do not suit some people. Even the way the victim looks can become a reason for a certain part of society.

There are many prejudices in our society regarding domestic violence. There are women who, when they discover that their daughters are victims of their partners, say "let alone my husband beat me too", "no one died from a slap".

If a woman can think like that, it means her education leaves something to be desired.

Right from school, the place where we all acquire the necessary tools to discern between good and evil, where we learn what respect, equality are, we learn to become autonomous and respect the autonomy of those next to us, teachers must educate the coming generations about gender acceptance and equality.

It is necessary, from the school, to insist on the implementation of programs to prevent the commission of acts of violence. Teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, doctors, representatives of non-governmental organizations and other specialists in the field, all to participate in educating the new generations to prevent acts of violence.

In the case presented above, the victim and her husband have been complaining since 2021 that they are being harassed and threatened by the criminal. Teodora Marcu was constantly threatened, living in constant terror. She informed the authorities that the aggressor possessed two firearms.

The attacker was not present at the first attack. Teodora was not the first woman harassed by the attacker. However, the authorities let him go free. Free to kill.

So many indications that the young woman was in danger, repeated violence, death threats, the abusive relationship since the victim was only 14 years old, multiple instances of physical and verbal aggression, the existence of other women abused by the aggressor. However, the authorities let him go free every time.

What follows from this? What can we understand from all this?

We are convinced that victims of violence do not receive understanding, perhaps they are not believed, they are asked for evidence upon evidence. It is imperative that the Romanian state insists on training specialists in the field. Police officers, prosecutors, judges must be specialized in such cases, trained and taught to understand how to interact with assaulted women, to understand the dynamics between the victim and the aggressor, what is the victim's reaction in the case of violence, etc.

It is necessary for every locality to have accessible services, psychological and legal counseling services, and shelters for victims of domestic violence who decide to leave abusive relationships and who can rely on the help of the Romanian state authorities.

We need urgent and immediate measures, measures that respond to every type of violence. Statistically, we are in 4th place in the EU in terms of violence against women in the family or by a partner.

It is true that abused women can be protected for a period of time by a protection order and since August 31, a protection order can be obtained for any act of violence regardless of the nature of the relationship between partners. Any person can request the issuance of a protection order in certain situations (if they are being followed at home or at work, if they are

being harassed online and in situations where they feel threatened, if they are being intimidated).

Protection orders can be violated and in such situations, victims of assaults must see that state authorities, namely the police, the courts and all those involved in this process, treat the violation of the protection order with the utmost seriousness, victims must see that aggressors pay when they violate the protection order.

Yesterday, June 23, 2025, Law no. 116/2025 amending Law no. 286/2009 on the Criminal Code and amending and supplementing Law no. 26/2024 on the protection order was published in the Official Gazette.

In art. 8 paragraph (8) it is stated that: "In the event of the submission of the provisional protection order according to the provisions of paragraph (7), the initial duration for which it was ordered is extended, by law, until the resolution in first instance of the application for the issuance of the protection order. The prosecutor shall immediately notify this to the police unit that submitted the provisional protection order, which shall take measures to immediately inform the persons who were the subject of it". In art. 18, paragraph (2), a new paragraph is introduced, paragraph (3) which states that: "If the acts provided for in paragraphs (1) and (2) are committed by a person who has previously committed a crime of violation of the measures ordered by the protection order or the provisional protection order, the special limits of the punishment shall be increased by half".

Art. 25 paragraph (1) is amended and has the following content: "The person against whom a measure has been ordered by the protection order and the person for whose benefit a protection order has been issued may request the revocation of the order or the replacement of the ordered measure".

In Teodora Marcu's case, it was not the legislation that was the problem, but the way the authorities responded to the entire situation, the complaints of the victim and her husband, the profile of the aggressor, the inability of the authorities to anticipate the danger even though the signs were obvious, all of these led to the tragedy that occurred.

In this case, as in many other cases, an assessment of the risk to which the victim was exposed was necessary, given the repeated violence to which she was subjected, the death threats, the abusive relationship in which the victim had lived in terror since the age of 14.

It is necessary that in the future the authorities involved in such cases analyze the situations of women who ask for help, precisely in order to identify, taking into account the cases they have had previously, the existence of the danger to which the victim is exposed. Such situations can no longer be treated superficially, the victims need understanding and for this we need specialists.

It is also necessary to organize information campaigns. Victims of domestic violence and not only, victims of aggression of any kind, must be informed about all the protection tools they can use in case of need.

Moreover, women who do not have the courage or do not want to or cannot, must be encouraged so that in cases where they feel that they are in situations that put their lives in danger or in situations where they are actually tired of being assaulted by their life partners, they can confidently turn to the state authorities, to know that the state authorities can defend them, can support them in their journey towards a life free of violence.

In Romanian legislation, namely Law no. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence, Law no. 174/2018 on amending and supplementing Law no. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence; Methodology on the method of participation in special psychological counseling programs, organized by public or private specialized services of 07.12.2018; Decision no. 365/2018 for the approval of the National Strategy on promoting equal opportunities and treatment between women and men and preventing and combating domestic violence for the period 2018 - 2021 and of the Operational Plan for the implementation - 2021 of the National Strategy on promoting equal opportunities and treatment between women and men and preventing and combating domestic violence for the period 2018; Decision no. 476/2019 amending and supplementing the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of Law no. 197/2012 on quality assurance in the field of social services, approved by Government Decision no. 118/2014, and Government Decision no. 867/2015 for the approval of the Nomenclature of social services, as well as the framework regulation for the organization and functioning of social services; Decision no. 867/2015 for the approval of the Nomenclature of social services, as well as the framework regulations for the organization and functioning of social services; Order no. 28/2019 on the approval of the minimum standards for the prevention and combating of domestic violence; Order no. 146/2578/2018 on the method of managing cases of domestic violence by police officers; Procedure for emergency intervention in cases of domestic violence of 07.12.2018; Directive No. 29/2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA.

The above list demonstrates the existence of regulations that support victims of violence.

Statistics, however, show an alarming increase. Between January and April 2025, over 40,000 cases of domestic violence were reported nationwide. During these four months, police issued 3,788 temporary protection orders, of which 1,464 were converted into protection orders by the courts. 1,690 of these protection orders were violated.

Even though the electronic bracelet is a relatively new tool, the Romanian Police informs us that this year, from January to April inclusive, 726 people were monitored with such bracelets. This type of monitoring is in the process of expanding in our country and it is expected that by the end of 2025, the system will be operational in all counties of Romania.

In Law no. 174/2018 amending and supplementing Law no. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence, in art. 8 paragraph (3) it is stated that: "The National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, based on its role as a central structure with a methodological coordination role of decentralized specialized structures that can ensure intervention and the provision of social services for victims of domestic violence, in partnership with other central public authorities that can intervene or provide social services for different categories of victims of domestic violence, including children who witness domestic violence, and together with local public administration authorities with responsibilities for ensuring the provision of social services, will monitor local inter-institutional cooperation to prevent and combat domestic violence."

Also, in art. 9 paragraph (1 and 2) of the same law it is stated that "The Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health,

the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, annually develops and disseminates documentary materials on the prevention, causes and consequences of domestic violence" and that the Ministry of Health is obliged to develop instructions to ensure that family doctors and specialist doctors in the public or private health system note suspicions of domestic violence in the patient's file and that information about information and counseling services for victims of domestic violence such as an emergency telephone line - helpline is displayed in each health unit.

In art. 13 paragraph (1) the legislator indicates that: Local public administration authorities have the obligation to take the following specific measures: a) to include the issue of preventing and combating domestic violence in regional, county and local development strategies and programs; b) to provide logistical, informational and material support to departments with responsibilities in preventing and combating domestic violence; c) to establish directly, in public partnership or, as the case may be, in public-private partnership, social services for preventing and combating domestic violence and to support their functioning; d) to develop programs for preventing and combating domestic violence; e) to support family aggressors' access to psychological counseling, psychotherapy, psychiatric, detoxification and alcohol withdrawal treatments; f) to develop and implement projects in the field of preventing and combating domestic violence; g) to provide in its annual budget amounts to support social services and other social assistance measures for victims of domestic violence and for other measures aimed at preventing and combating domestic violence; h) to bear, from the local budget, in cases of domestic violence found following the registration of the victim by the public social assistance services, the expenses for drawing up legal documents, as well as those necessary for obtaining forensic certificates for victims of domestic violence; i) to bear, from the local budget, in cases of domestic violence found following the registration of the victim by the public social assistance services, the expenses for medical assistance for victims of domestic violence who are not medically insured; j) to collaborate in the implementation of a system for registering, reporting and managing cases of domestic violence. k) to display at their headquarters and publish on their websites information on the ways to access social services for preventing and combating domestic violence and on the programs they implement in this field; l) to annually prepare and publish on their website a report summarizing the measures taken and the programs implemented for preventing and combating the phenomenon of domestic violence and what expenses were incurred from the local budget for fulfilling the obligations under letters g), h) and i); m) to display in public transport stations the number of the emergency telephone line - helpline and any other information on accessing social services for preventing and combating domestic violence or the programs implemented; n) to include in contracts with public transport service providers their obligation to display in the means of transport the number of the emergency telephone line - helpline.

Law no. 1/2025 on the amendment and completion of Law no. 217/2003 on the prevention and combating of domestic violence states that: "The Ministry of Education has the obligation to ensure that information about information and counseling services for victims of domestic violence such as an emergency telephone line - helpline is displayed in each educational unit."

We have presented above only a small part of the measures that have been taken to support victims of domestic violence. As can be seen, from a legislative point of view, the necessary measures have been taken to support victims of domestic violence.

In practice, however, the authorities failed.

Not long after Teodora's murder, less than two weeks later, on June 16, 2025, a new case shocked Romania. A new Teodora case.

A 22-year-old woman, Andreea, also pregnant, is killed with an axe by her partner, right in front of her children and mother because she decided to break up with him. The 26th femicide this year. In this case too, the Police were alerted to the possibility that the man might become aggressive and have violent behavior. However, the man was released.

Italy

The newspapers continue to present us with cases of extremely young victims of a distorted conception of love. This is Martina's story, but also the cry of many others. And our silence is no longer an option.

On May 26, 2025, Martina Carbonaro, aged just 14, disappears without a trace. Her mother is waiting for her at home, in Afragola, near Naples. Martina had gone out with a friend and said she would be back soon. This does not happen. The search mechanism is activated. The entire city mobilizes. For two days, flyers, calls, posts on social networks, her voice amplified by newspapers and television. Then, the discovery. Martina's lifeless body is found under a mattress, in the garage of her ex-boyfriend's house, a 17-year-old who had not accepted the end of the relationship. According to reconstructions, Martina had refused a hug. A simple gesture, of freedom, that cost her her life.

Another femicide. A crime that brings to light a social problem that crosses time and generations: love transformed into obsession, affection diverted into possessiveness. Martina Carbonaro's femicide is not an isolated case, but part of a large and systemic phenomenon that affects Italy and many other countries. The murder of a minor for a refusal – a denied hug – reflects the collective failure to prevent the culture of possessiveness, which masquerades as love and develops in everyday indifference. When sentimental education is lacking and violence becomes language, the risk is that even the simplest gestures become fatal.

This case requires serious reflection not only on an emotional level, but also on a legal and cultural level. Society must ask itself: why can a teenage girl die because she simply refused a physical gesture? Where does the educational, emotional, and legal system get stuck? What tools do we have – and which ones do we not use?

School plays a fundamental role in preventing gender-based violence. In the school environment, the first relationships are formed, the limits of respect, of healthy affectivity, of consent are learned. Introducing a structured and mandatory affective education means providing tools for interpreting and managing emotions, contributing to defuse toxic dynamics from an early age. Respect cannot be an option. It must be a foundation. Educating in the sense of affectivity means educating in the sense of limitation, of recognizing the other as an autonomous subject, of accepting refusal. It means learning that healthy love does not possess, does not coerce, does not humiliate, does not threaten.

Recent statistics indicate that one in three girls between the ages of 16 and 24 has already suffered some form of violence in the emotional sphere. In this age group, mechanisms

of dependency and idealization are strong, and the absence of correct educational models favors the consolidation of control and abuse dynamics. In addition, the early and unregulated use of social networks has amplified the influence of toxic relationship models, based on romantic idealization, digital control, emotional manipulation and jealousy as proof of love. In this context, the training of teachers and school staff is also essential; they must know how to recognize the signs of relationship discomfort and promptly address risky situations.

The "Codice Rosso" (Red Code) – introduced in Italy by Law no. 69 of 19 July 2019 – is a measure aimed at strengthening the protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence. It provides for an accelerated procedure for complaints of mistreatment, stalking, sexual violence and other crimes, with the obligation for the prosecutor to hear the victim within three days. However, its effectiveness depends largely on the actual implementation and training of operators. The lack of a truly interdisciplinary approach between prosecutors, law enforcement and territorial services generates delays, fragmentation and often exposes victims to additional risks. The existence of a law is not enough if there is a lack of will and competence to apply it coherently and in a timely manner. Often, women report and then remain alone, without support, forced to give up due to fear, economic dependence or isolation. The risk is that the state will fail in its task of protection, leaving room for resignation and silence.

One dies for a denied embrace when affection has been understood as possession, when refusal is perceived as an unbearable wound for the fragile and violent ego of the one who has internalized affective supremacy. In educational contexts poor in healthy examples and models, refusal is experienced as annihilation. The phenomenon of femicide never appears out of the blue. Often, it is the result of underestimated signals, of relationships marked from the beginning by jealousy, isolation, control. The traditional romantic narrative – based on the idea that love justifies everything, including suffering – only fuels these toxic models. It is necessary to deconstruct certain stereotypes, including through the media and cultural products. Language holds enormous power: saying "crime of passion" instead of "murder of a woman" is already an act of cultural complicity. Just as reporting femicide based on the alleged emotional state of the man who kills – "he was desperate", "he didn't accept the breakup" – risks shifting responsibility, almost justifying it. We need to change the narrative, from newspaper headlines to classrooms and television programs.

We need a justice system that knows how to listen, understand, protect. A justice system that does not allow itself to be deceived by the manipulative strategies implemented by those who exercise violence, such as blaming the victim, minimizing behaviors or instrumentalizing children. At the international level, among the most important references is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), which provided a legally binding definition of the concept of discrimination and created a Committee of Experts tasked with monitoring its implementation. Together with the 1999 Optional Protocol, the Convention represents the main international legal instrument on the subject, also transposed by Italy in 1985. No less significant is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (IV UN Conference on Women, 1995) and General Recommendation no. 19 of the CEDAW Committee (1992), which provided a broad interpretation of violence against women as a form of structural discrimination.

However, the formal adoption of normative instruments is not enough. In Italy, the UN Committee has repeatedly signaled a "serious cultural deficit" and a "failure to fully realize the

principle of equality". The law must be translated into daily practice, into concrete action. This means investing in prevention, training, listening and, above all, in an accessible and competent territorial network.

A similar denunciation appears in the volume *Ma il problema sono io. La vittimizzazione secondaria ad opera del sistema giudiziario. Violenza domestica e allontanamento dei figli dalle parti*, which documents how women who denounce are often discredited, accused of manipulating children, even punished with the loss of parental responsibility. A system that, instead of protecting, strikes. The so-called "secondary victimization" – that is, the reiteration of violence by the institutions themselves – represents one of the most serious and subtle forms of injustice, because it compromises trust in the law and in justice itself. The voice of women must be believed, listened to, protected. Not judged twice.

The objective must not only be to punish those who commit violence, but to prevent the commission of violence. Prevention means culture, listening, training, concrete support for victims. It also means financing anti-violence centers, supporting shelters, guaranteeing stable resources for exit routes. Because every woman must have the real possibility of saving herself before being killed. And every minor must be able to grow up in a healthy context, in which love is not synonymous with fear.

Every step forward, every norm or convention, every protocol or guideline remains ineffective if it is not accompanied by a real cultural change, rooted in education, respect, freedom. The fight for equality and against gender violence is far from over. And every victim, every story like Martina's, asks us not to remain silent.

On 13 January 2020, GREVIO published its first Evaluation Report on the level of implementation of the Istanbul Convention by Italy, which, by acceding to it, has undertaken to combat all forms of gender-based violence. It should be recalled, however, that there is an infringement procedure against Italy, as well as for twenty other Member States, for the deemed incomplete reception of the directive. The GREVIO Group of Experts is an independent body that operates according to a procedure for evaluating the level of compliance with the Convention, a procedure that is developed mainly on the basis of the responses to the questionnaires administered to the States and a visit by the Group to the country evaluated. It also collects information by consulting various other sources, including non-governmental associations, representatives of civil society and other European entities. The document contains a broad appreciation of some of the actions undertaken and measures adopted by the Italian authorities in implementing the Convention. The recommendations contained therein, however, highlight aspects of protection that are not fully functional or adequate.

Conclusions

I have presented two above ways of regulating domestic violence in two European countries, two cases, two victims: the case of Teodora Marcu, mother, daughter, wife, friend, colleague... and the case of Martina Carbonara, daughter, granddaughter, friend, colleague... . I made this list of qualities to highlight the fact that in such situations, not only the deceased victims are victims. In reality we are talking about more victims. All those who loved them, admired them, lived with them, are the victims of the aggressors. All these people are forced to learn to live without those they loved.

Unfortunately, domestic violence is and remains a complex problem because there are multiple factors that contribute to its occurrence. We recall the following factors: tensions in the couple, to which both partners contribute, behavioral patterns acquired in the family or community, mental health problems, economic difficulties (poverty), jealousy, alcohol consumption, lack of education, environment of origin, urban/rural, etc.

Even though the number of cases of violence increases from year to year, it is proven that Romanian society is quite tolerant of such situations and this only contributes to the increase in the rate of domestic violence.

As we have shown above, any legislative measure remains ineffective as long as efforts are not made for real changes, from education, culture, freedom and respect to the training of involved and dedicated specialists. Otherwise, there is a risk that the state will not be able to fulfill its mission as a protector of citizens in crisis situations.

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