



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Measures to fight  
violence against women  
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Comments Paper - Romania



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# Fighting violence against women in Romania: lessons to be learned from Spanish and Irish good practices

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Policy background

Violence against women had barely captured the public attention during the 1990s. At the time, the majority of the population considered domestic violence a private matter (OSF, 2000). Moreover, a rather tolerant attitude towards less serious forms of violence (e.g. insult, threat, slapping) was shared by some categories, particularly the ones mostly exposed to abuses (CPE, 2003).

The 2002 National Anti-poverty Plan mentioned domestic violence as a “morally unacceptable situation” and included its eradication among the government’s strategic priorities (Guvernul României, 2002). The EU requirements regarding equal opportunities policies and most of all the accession political criteria increased the government responsiveness to violence against women. Additionally, the coalition of NGOs active in this field called attention to the severity of the phenomenon and to the need of coordinated action in preventing and combating it. The first law (Law 217/2003) that addressed specifically the family violence was enacted in 2003.

The notion of “violence against women” was not employed in either national legislation or documents pertaining at equal opportunities policy. Family violence is commonly understood as a proxy for violence against women. Family-centered perspective prevailed in both the 2003 law and the first National Strategy on Preventing and Combating Family Violence (2005-2007). It is actually carried on by the recently enacted legislation (Law 25/2012).

### 1.2. Trends in family violence

Increasing public awareness of family violence and implementation of specific policies led to a fast increase of registered cases. Since 2004, the number of abused women raised steadily year by year. In 2009, the total number was 70% higher than the one in 2005 and amounted at a total of 12461 cases<sup>1</sup>, but the victim’s sex was specified solely in 77.28% of them. Women and girls add up to 4000 cases in 2005 and to 6804 in 2009. In average, they represent 70% of total cases with known sex. About 60 percent of registered abuses were inflicted to women within their couple relationships (marriage, cohabitation, engagement). A third of all female victims suffered abuses day after day (Ministerul Muncii, 2009). The 2012 National Strategy to Prevent and Fight the Phenomenon of Family

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<sup>1</sup> Victims of all ages and forms of violence.

Violence reports a cumulated number of 82000 cases and 800 deaths for 2004-2011 period (Ministerul Muncii, 2012a). In spite of the established reporting mechanisms, official data consistency in the area of family violence is rather questionable.

Surveys give a more accurate commensuration of the violence inflicted to women than official statistics do. In the first national survey (2003), self-reported victims who suffered at least one form of violence in the last 12 months represented 9% among adult female respondents. Subsequently, the estimated number of abused women reached 800000. Almost 18% of them had such an experience during their life time (CPE, 2003). A 2008 national survey shows that over 1,2 million women were victims during the year of reference. Compared with the 2003 data, the number of females who suffered one form of violence in the last 12 months raised with 1.6 percent. The increase is up to 4.1 percent when women's life time is considered (Ministerul Muncii, 2012a).

The existing 1 to 10 gap between official statistics and survey data indicates that violence within family remains hidden and underreported for its most part. In addition, absence of national survey data after 2008 precludes any reliable conclusion about recent changes in prevalence or characteristics of the violence against women.

### **1.3. Programmes and services to prevent and fight family violence**

Information centres tackling domestic violence are run predominantly by NGOs while awareness raising activities are mostly achieved through campaigns. Two other shelters are administered in a public-private partnership.

According to figures included in the 2012 National Strategy, there are 59 shelters available to women victims in Romania. Most of them (38) are operated by public institutions, namely the county directorates for social assistance and protection of children's rights while 19 shelters are in the private or non-governmental sector. Victim support centres provide psychological, social and legal counselling, phone counselling, and representation in court. Actually there are 20 units and half of them operate in the public sector (Ministerul Muncii, 2012a). The number of the non-governmental ones decreased since 2009 as a result of the insufficient funding.

Treatment and social reintegration centres for aggressors constitute a relatively new component in the service sector which addresses family violence. Commonly, services to aggressors provide psychological, social and legal counselling, psychiatric assessment and job orientation. In 2010, only 6 such units (4 non-governmental and 2 public) existed. Meanwhile their number diminished to 3 (Ministerul Muncii, 2012a), due to the financial difficulties encountered by the non-governmental providers since then.

The aggregated data about social programmes and services provided to victims of violence are inadequate. With few exceptions, neither public institutions nor NGOs offer systematic information about their activities.

## 2. Policy debate and topical changes

After almost 9 years of an unproductive status quo in the policy addressing the family violence phenomenon, both institutional changes within county directorates and the development of a methodological framework paved the way for more effective measures in family violence cases. In addition, Law 217/ 2003 was eventually amended and completed as a response to substantial criticism expressed by women organisations.

The 2012 legal act institutes the “protection order”, a measure which was constantly called for by victims’ advocates. While maintaining the family-centred approach, the new law defines family violence in a more comprehensive way. In addition, the specific forms of violence as well as the victim’s rights are explicitly stated. According to the new legal provision, it is obligatory for the public administration authorities to guarantee the right of victims to information about institutions and organisations that provide counselling, assistance and protection according to her needs; the judicial unit where they can place charge against the perpetrator; the right to, conditions and procedure for free legal assistance (Ministerul Muncii, 2012b).

Whilst promoting and even justifying the family approach, the 2012 National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight the Phenomenon of Family Violence refers explicitly to the gender dimension of family violence and to the unbalanced power relations between men and women in society. The Strategy acknowledges many dysfunctions that exist in the system created to fight family violence. The need to improve the implementation of the new legislation is pressing (Ministerul Muncii, 2012a). At present, service provision to both victims and aggressors is still problematic in terms of availability, coverage, quality and effectiveness.

Since 2005 the National Agency for Family Protection coordinates policies and actions against domestic violence. In 2010, the rationalisation of the public expenditure led to the unification of the Agency with the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights. The resulting National Authority for the Protection of the Family and Children’s Rights had the responsibility for both family and child protection (ANPFDC, 2010). At present, a general directorate (General Directorate for Child Protection) has similar mission and responsibilities within the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly Persons. The actual design and capacity of the institutional structure are hardly appropriate to the strategic objectives and the National Action Plan for 2013-2017.

The economic constraints faced by Romania since 2010 increased the financial vulnerability of the entire social protection system. The utilisation of European funds is actually setback by the complicated bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, long delays in the reimbursement process endangered the very existence of several non-governmental programmes.

### 3. Transferability issues

#### 3.1. The use of ICT in the fight against gender-based violence in Spain

The four programmes developed in Spain have an important potential of transferability. Moreover, they are consistent with several objectives of the Romanian National Strategy.

The discussion paper presents thorough descriptions of the services' characteristics and a valuable assessment of their pros and cons. Both technical details and evaluation may smoothen the progress of implementing the good practices in Romania.

The concept of the *Web resource for support and prevention* is common to several countries that implemented similar programmes. It is not the case of Romania, where the collection of information about service providers is often deficient, both at central and local level. Despite the complexity of the programme, its cost seems affordable even to a low income country.

There are few helplines that operate in Romania, but none of them compares with the Spanish *24-hour Helpline 016* programmes. Whilst the last one is national-based, state-funded, provides complete information on resources in 47 languages and operates 24 hours, the Romanian helplines tend to be local, non-governmental and they function for a limited period of time. Given the high budget necessary to operate a similar comprehensive 24-hour helpline, the eventual funding could be achieved within a public-private partnership.

As in Spain, the state obligations to materialise the right of victims to information, counselling and protection are legally binding. This is a solid argument in favour of transferring the *Web resource for support and prevention* as well as the *24-hour Helpline 016* practices.

*Mobile telephone service for care and protection of victims (ATENPRO)* is definitely a useful practice. However, its transferability is limited by its operational complexity and high cost. The public-private partnership is a prerequisite for such a programme. It is an area where mobile telephone companies may well demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility values.

*Telematic tracking system to monitor restraining orders ("electronic bracelet)* is an effective tool to prevent the perpetrator to commit new aggressions. In spite of its relatively high cost, the system should be considered by Romanian authorities for a pilot implementation. The programme might be put into operation predominantly in large localities to ensure a fair cost-benefit ratio.

#### 3.2. Domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes in Ireland

The Irish discussion paper focuses on interventions aimed at changing both cognitive thinking and behaviour of the domestic violence perpetrators. Scientifically sound evidence supports the policy as well as the methodological choices.

Evaluation includes both the outcomes in improving women and children safety and the contribution in achieving gender equality. In addition, the good practices are based on an extended experience in running and assessing intervention programmes for perpetrators.

The area of services for perpetrators is underdeveloped in Romania. There are very few programmes and they operate on a small scale. Concepts as well as objectives of such services are insufficiently elaborated. Furthermore, programme evaluation is carried on very seldom.

In Ireland, the services for perpetrators are integrated in a coordinated effort at the national level. Activities are run by highly specialised personnel from several professional domains. These characteristics recommend them as good practices. At the same time, it limits the transferability to Romania, where the institutional system of protection and fighting family violence needs further consolidation. However, specific organisational elements or professional approaches can be incorporated in the existing services. The Irish good practice may well be a model for the new centres for aggressors, which the Romanian National Strategy pledges to create within the 2013-2018 agenda.

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