

Systems That Help: A Survivors' Manifesto

Elaborated during the Survivors' Forum 2026 in Romania, involving 60 women with lived experiences of domestic violence and professionals who provide daily support



A much stronger focus on how laws work in practice: perfect theories serve no one when not applied. Those who draft legislation on domestic violence should consult many different women who have experienced violence, from diverse backgrounds.

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What is the vision for a system in which domestic violence is not only properly addressed, but also prevented, so that we no longer stand by helplessly as femicides occur? It is a system that cultivates grassroots communities for prevention and support, where the lived experience of women who have overcome violence—who can inspire other women—meets the professional expertise of social workers, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, and police officers whose training is centered on the safety of survivors and children and on discouraging violence long term. Few people turn to a system in which they feel treated similarly as in abusive relationships, so we need a system that treats us with dignity and recognizes our right to make our own decisions: no one rushes to replace one abuser with another, particularly a systemic one.

What models of success are available? It is rather miraculous that despite low funding and support from the state, civil society organizations dedicated to combating domestic violence and local survivors' groups still persist in Romania, such as #ȘiEuReșesc in Brașov, Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu, GRAB Satu Mare. The ȘiEuReșesc communities support over 700 women each year who are facing the effects of domestic violence, with the voluntary involvement of more than 80 survivors and specialists. In Romanian, we use the term “victor” for survivor to bring to light the extraordinary resilience of women who do so much more than survive. “Victor” does not mean defeating violence, which still surrounds all of us systemically, but overcoming the fear of jointly resisting violence to build alternatives.

Such groups should exist in every community: wherever there are women who have experienced violence and professionals willing to help. The civic sector brings valuable human resources; in turn, the state must provide material support, such as funding and adequate spaces.

„The support group helped me prioritize my own needs, to see that I matter too. If I am well, those who depend on me will be well too.”

„The gain was peace of mind, regained self-confidence, building relationships, and supporting others in similar situations.”

„Those who draft laws on domestic violence should see a support group in real life and meet face to face with as many women who have experienced violence as possible.”

What are the gaps that hurt us most?

Access to justice is becoming increasingly difficult: where financial abuse and control by the perpetrator are present, the victim has no real chance for justice, because magistrates rarely judge by the law. There is a need for “justice free of corruption and bias” and for “clear legal practices that prioritize children above all, rather than the rights of the abusive father.” What also hurts is the judgment and blame we receive from within the system, from those who are supposed to help us: „I wish no woman would ever have to hear <<Is that all he did to you?>>”.

Recommendations from survivors:

- **The diverse voices and stories of survivors should be heard in public awareness campaigns, in schools, and at local events; “Billboards should promote relationships based on respect and non-violence. The same should apply to radio broadcast.”**

- **Education for healthy relationships** in schools, including training for teachers to cultivate relationship skills at all ages, with the involvement of survivors;
- **Greater economic support**, including housing, for people affected by domestic violence. Support for children in single-parent families should no longer be based on the parent's income;
- **More support services for survivors**: not only crisis assistance, but also psychotherapy, psychoeducation, and **long-term services** that take into account the specific nature of trauma, because the effects of violence are felt for years, and often the perpetrator's harassment continues long after separation;
- **Approaches for working with perpetrators** through trained specialists who hold them accountable and support them in choosing alternatives to violence, rather than reinforcing the idea that they are the victims;
- **Safe neighborhoods**, that do not tolerate violence, with strong women who inspire others around them;
- **Reform of joint custody**: in cases of domestic violence, perpetrators should not have the same rights as victims, as this allows violence to continue;
- **Laws aligned with EU legislation** on violence against women, with a focus on consent, prevention, justice, and protection for victims, and accountability for perpetrators;
- **More support from employers**: info & awareness, as well as leave of absence for domestic violence;
- **Advocacy training for survivors** to engage in dialogue with authorities;
- **Personal development, support, and social groups for survivors** who, in turn, support other women.

Recommendations from professionals active in the field:

„Support groups for those who provide support. Working daily with domestic violence means exposure to trauma.”

„Police officers and psychotherapists need training on risk and safety, as well as on working with perpetrators. The earlier a perpetrator is stopped, the better it is both for him and for those around him.”

- Interdisciplinary collaboration in domestic violence interventions, coordinated by specialized professionals and centered on the safety of the victim and children, not on reconciliation/mediation: “We are here to save people, not marriages at any cost.”
- Bridges for dialogue between professionals, victims, and the general public;
- A consultation platform for survivors to help improve legislation;
- Greater emphasis on the proper implementation of legislation;
- Involving men in domestic violence prevention activities, in campaigns such as #NotLikeThis;
- Funding for research on domestic violence, including impact evaluation studies of existing legislative measures;
- Professionals who work daily with cases of violence need support services and state-funded supervision;
- A mandatory module on risk and victim safety in the training programs of COPSI-accredited psychotherapists;

- Training specialists to work with perpetrators from a perspective centered on safety and the reduction of violent behavior.

State institutions, private companies - especially large employers, the media, and other NGOs are essential allies in a support system where women find the courage to leave domestic violence, and their proactive involvement can make the difference between the failure of the current system and real change.

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