

# [***Italy grapples with its patriarchal history as femicide cases shock the nation***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BH9-MJN1-JBSS-S22S-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Barbie Latza Nadeau and Antonia Mortensen, CNN. Video by Alessandro Gentile

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Some are stabbed, some are shot, some are strangled. But all the women killed by [*femicide*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2023/05/world/femicide-mother-mexico-cnnphotos/) in [*Italy*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/15/europe/italy-senate-migrants-albania-intl/index.html) have one thing in common: they knew their killers.

More than 100 women were killed in 2023. The term 'femicide' - which is typically when a woman is killed by a current or former partner - became so topical an Italian encyclopedia named it as its word of the year in 2023.

Italy might have a female prime minister, but she makes a point of not identifying herself as a feminist.

The country only criminalized crimes of passion in 1981, and the judicial system still often gives lighter sentences to male killers if their wives were unfaithful.

In a notorious case in 2020, 80-year-old Antonio Gozzini was cleared of bludgeoning to death his 62-year-old wife, Cristina Maioli with a rolling pin while she slept and then slicing her throat and cutting up her legs because the court said he suffered a "raptus" or delirious jealousy over his wife's job at a local school. Gozzini remains free today.

The prevalence of domestic violence in Italy is fed by societal failures, says Lorella Zanardo, an activist, educator and documentary filmmaker.

Zanardo's 2009 documentary"Il Corpo delle Donne" or "Women's Bodies," about sexism in Italian public and private television, started a national conversation about the link between sexism, sexual assault and [*gender equality*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/asequals/anti-gender-equality-threat-explained-as-equals-intl-cmd/).

While Italy does not have Europe's highest rate of domestic violence, it is among the lowest ranked in [*Europe*](https://www.cnn.com/world/europe) when it comes to gender equality.

In 2023 Italy dropped in the rankings from the previous year based on factors like increasing wage disparity, which makes it harder for women to leave marriages because they cannot support themselves.

"Italy has been a country of patriarchy for many, many years, but it's also a country of difficult to understand because in the 70s one of the most important and successful women's movement was Italian," Zanardo said.

"I have asked myself what happened after this movement**.** It's difficult to explain but this movement was very political [and] had a very clear political connotation."

Part of the problem with having a feminist movement so closely tied to ***politics*** is that it becomes divisive.

In Italy, the feminist movement was largely driven by the left, which meant that those who supported right-leaning parties, including current [*Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/10/europe/italy-giorgia-meloni-sexual-violence-intl-cmd/index.html), have distanced themselves from feminism entirely.

"We have a woman prime minister, but she's completely against it," Zanardo said, adding that Meloni has even chosen to use the masculine article in front of the Italian word 'prime minister' rather than embracing the fact that Italy has one of the world's few female leaders.

"She pretends to be called 'il' prime minister like a man and I think that awoman like her could be an activist also in language by showing to younger generations that leaders can be women," Zanardo said.

Meloni's office did not respond to a request for comment on the reason behind the use of the male article in front of her title.

Feminist movements have been successful vehicles to drive greater equality across the world. The Council of Europe says, "In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice."

And it is feminist movements that are doing the most to help Italian victims of abuse.

CADMI is a shelter and resource center for abused women in Milan that has rescued 600 women from abusive situations in the last year.

The center was started by Italy's Union of Women, which is a left-leaning anti-fascist feminist group that opened the center to give women a lifeline.

Cristina Carelli, who runs the center, told CNN they work on rehabilitation and re-education to empower the women to evolve from victims to survivors, and to become financially independent. They have helped support more than 36,000 women since they opened the doors in 1986, Carelli says. Developing relationships built on trust is key to empowerment, but their work hasn't always been easy.

When they started, people distrusted them, Carelli says.

"They were very young, but they hadn't recognized the violence and hadn't had the chance to get out of that story. Why? In fact, because the anti-violence centers were little known," she said.

"And then because even culturally, women were still very rooted in patriarchal culture, which is that culture that is based on a disparity in power between males and females, also on a relationship dimension of very different conceptions of relationships."

Carelli believes that success inspires other women. "For us, a woman's path to freedom is also important for all other women, because it demonstrates, it is symbolically representative of a possibility," she said. "Women have the right to be free and therefore this has a strong value for us, including political value."

There was a flashpoint last year when in November, 22-year-old Giulia Cecchettin's body was found with multiple knife wounds in a ravine in northern Italy a week after being seen with her ex-boyfriend Filippo Turetta.

Turetta fled to [*Germany*](https://www.cnn.com/world/europe/germany) where he confessed he had killedhe woman he still called his girlfriend even though the two were no longer together.

Cecchettin's friends told investigators that she was concerned that Turetta was stalking her. She met him to try to defuse the situation, her sister said.

Turetta is awaiting a fast-track trial that will take into account his confession. He faces up to life in prison, but will likely be given a shorter sentence due to his confession, based on cases with a similar precedent.

Cecchettin's murder reignited the debate on violence against women, with massive protests held across the country. More than 8,000 people, including Italy's president, attended her funeral. But a week after she was buried, four more women were dead, all killed by ex-husbands or boyfriends.

Maria Grazia escaped a relationship she describes as abusive.

She told CNN that she contacted the authorities numerous times, but no one took her seriously.

Women in Italy who try to escape their abusers or fear for their lives consistently complain that police are often condescending or accusatory, that somehow it is the victim's fault for provoking the man, or that they should just let him "cool off."

"There were threats, continuous threats," Maria Grazia told CNN.

"Weapons, messages, insults, my intercom was broken, I wasn't sleeping at night." She said she hid in her home with the lights out. She was afraid. "I called the police, who came, but then asked me, 'there isn't any blood?'," she says. "I replied 'but when there is blood I will no longer need you.'"

When she finally got away, she and a friend went on to start a cooperative called Maison Antigone, which has helped thousands of women navigate a complicated bureaucratic system that often makes it difficult to report abuse.

Often women are left to feel responsibility for the abuse, she said.

Her group also helps women work through Italy's complex family law legal system to protect children as well.

Progress is slow and often hard to measure. After Cecchettin's murder, the Italian senate passed a unanimous bill to strengthen protections for women who are at risk, or who have asked authorities for restraining orders or for abusive partners to be removed from the home.

"This law introduces measures that in many cases can make the difference between life and death," Family Minister Eugenia Roccella said at the time.

But for many women the changes aren't coming fast enough.

"My generation has to educate the generation to come," said Christina, a woman who spoke to CNN. "We are failing [with] things I thought would have been gone with my grandparents' generation."

With additional reporting from CNN's Valentina Di Donato.

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