

Dr Sylwia Spurek, Deputy Ombudsperson (Poland)

In Poland the most common form of violence against women is domestic violence. It is one of the gravest abuse of human rights to physical integrity, to liberty, to life and health. Domestic violence victims can not fully enjoy their human rights. The majority of the perpetrators (90%) are men and majority of the victims are women and children.

Poland is an example of a country where the legislation in this matter on has been evolving. In 2002 the work on the first draft law on counteracting domestic violence started. We treated Austrian legislation as our role model, particularly regarding isolation of perpetrator of domestic violence from the victim. During the legislation process the ownership issues were the main concern and law that was adopted in 2005 lacked the most important part. In 2010 significant amendments to the law were adopted. They introduced inter alia the obligation for local authorities (self-governments) to create interdisciplinary teams composed of social assistant, local committees for solving alcohol-related problems, police, educational staff, healthcare staff and representatives from relevant NGOs. The role of the interdisciplinary team is to diagnose, monitor, and take measures to solve problems of domestic violence at local level and in individual cases. The procedure of “Blue Card” forms was introduced by an Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy in 2011. This procedure is independent from and complementary to any other criminal, family and civil law proceedings. The procedure is initiated by a representative of a competent service (mostly by a police officer but also by social workers, healthcare staff, teachers, or local committees for solving alcohol-related problems) when he/she suspects domestic violence. The victim of violence is then provided with relevant instructions and invited to a meeting with the interdisciplinary team for a discussion on the most adequate individual assistance plan. A separate meeting is organised by the interdisciplinary team for the perpetrator, notably to evaluate the situation of the family and encourage participation in programmes of corrective and educational measures. A 2014-2020 National Programme for Counteracting Domestic Violence that was adopted on the basis of the Law on Counteracting Domestic Violence, foresees actions in four areas: prevention and social education; protection of and assistance to those affected by domestic violence; influence on people using domestic violence; and raising competence of the relevant services. Finally, in 2012 Poland signed and in 2015 ratified the Istanbul Convention.

The laws still need to be improved in some extent. However the key is to fight the stereotypes on violence against women and domestic violence, concerning the real source of violence and the responsibility for the violence. The stereotypes result in victim's blaming and victim's shaming and in inefficiency of implementing the laws.