

Title: Gender-based violence is not inevitable: From women's rights advocacy to public policies on primary prevention in the UK and Poland

Violence against women and girls, as well as other gender-based violence (GBV), is one of the most widespread human rights violations, an extreme form of discrimination, and a threat to public safety and health. Physical and sexual violence against women by intimate partners and in public spaces is more likely to cause death and disability among women than stroke, diabetes and heart disease. It remains widespread and states are failing to effectively address it.

The project examines how women's rights organisations in the UK and Poland influence law and public policies on preventing violence – specifically: primary prevention - actions that are intended to prevent violence before it happens, addressing primarily its sources. Primary prevention goes beyond addressing individual incidents of violence. It aims to change the social and cultural factors that make violence more likely, such as harmful stereotypes, unequal power dynamics, and harmful social norms. This includes, e.g. broad equality education, counteracting stereotypes and toxic gender patterns, effectively combating discrimination on all levels – interpersonal as well as systemic, promoting healthy relationships and empowering women. Research shows that primary prevention, although necessary, is still overlooked – state policies focus mainly on treating the effects, instead of addressing the causes.

The UK is one of the few countries where policies on primary prevention of violence against women and GBV have been developed and implemented (e.g. the Equally Safe strategy in Scotland). Poland, despite social demands and international commitments, still does not have such policies.

The project aims to:

- identify actors and advocacy strategies in both countries;
- examine how organizations frame and define prevention;
- analyze the forms of resistance and “backlash” (counter-reaction to progressive change) they encounter;
- assess the extent to which social demands have been translated into law and public policies;
- develop practical recommendations supporting effective actions to prevent violence against women.

The project is qualitative in nature and will include, e.g. analysis of documents and materials, interviews with representatives of CSO, administration and decision-making bodies, and verification consultations with experts. The study draws from feminist sociology of law and security studies, the sociology of rights advocacy, framing theory and the engaged researcher approach.

The results of the study will contribute not only to the development of scientific knowledge, but can also support social and legal changes – so as to more effectively act for safety for all.