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A MESSAGE FROM YOUR ADVOCACY TEAM!

Following a lot of intense activity during the past months at the United Nations in New York and Geneva, as well as at the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European's Women Lobby, our Advocacy Team and its Representatives are delighted to report on their actions regarding the advancement of the women's agenda. We hope you enjoy reading it!

Elena Savu, *Vice President for Advocacy*

Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis, *President Elect & Head of Programme & Advocacy*

In this issue we focus on... CSW 58!

Every March, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) holds its annual two week-session at the United Nations in New York bringing together over 6,000 representatives of 193 states, UN entities, and about 400 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, such as Soroptimist International of Europe. This year, the priority theme of CSW was "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the MDGs for women and girls." At various sessions, experts addressed the advancements made in certain areas and alerted the participants to the major gaps which still need to be filled. Most sessions discussed the shape development goals will take after 2015 and what areas will be prioritised. Like every year, in addition to the official CSW sessions, two side programmes were run in parallel: a UN-member sponsored conference with over 135 sessions as well as more than 300 sessions and events put together by the NGO-CSW Forum at locations close to the UN Center.

As in years past, Soroptimist International acted as the perfect liaison for all Federations and organised daily briefings to ensure everyone was up to date with the latest developments. IPD Hilary Ratcliffe successfully organised two events entitled 'Blue is the New Pink' and 'Pink is the New Blue' focusing on the importance of involving men in the debate on gender equality. SI and several members of the four Federations, whether individually or together with other NGOs, also contributed to the drafting of the

CSW 58 *Agreed conclusions* by participating in a series of daily lobbying meetings called 'caucuses'. Structured within the UN framework, the caucuses are crucial for a broad range of constituents, both grassroots and subject matter experts, to be able to give their input to the *Agreed conclusions*, thereby ensuring challenges faced by women around the world are placed at the heart of the future development agenda. The UN Representatives in New York, led by Bette Levy, played a particularly strong leadership role in making our Global Voice for Women heard.

As SIE President Elect, this year I had the opportunity to lead the SIE delegation, which included IPP Kathy Kaaf, VP Advocacy Elena Savu, C&BL Chair Renata Trottmann Probst, APD Emine Erdem, former Finance Controller Hafdis Karlsdottir, and ED Anne Simon. I was also invited to speak at a panel on Solar Cookers where I highlighted the many successful projects that our Clubs are implementing in the area of women's economic empowerment, giving particular emphasis to the importance of education within the context of sustainable development.

SIE is certainly proud of its ECOSOC Status and will continue to contribute actively to improving the lives and status of women and girls everywhere.

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, *SIE President Elect & Head of Programme & Advocacy*



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ADVOCACY NEWS

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE

FIRST TIME AT CSW: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

'You have an important task before you. Less than two years remain to the MDG deadline. In that time we must also define a post-2015 development agenda. I count on your wisdom and commitment to bring the voices of women and girls to the table. I count on you to champion the human rights of all women and girls. You can count on my full support. We cannot achieve a world of dignity for all until we end gender inequality in all its forms.'

UN SG Ban Ki-moon at the opening of CSW 58

To many people, New York may be remembered as the city of skyscrapers and cosmopolitan fashion, but to me, it will always be the symbol of a unique experience: being part of the team that represented Soroptimist International of Europe and its 35,000 members in a global meeting that puts women and girls at its core. We were there to listen and to contribute – and to spread the word that Soroptimists are actively engaged in bettering the lives of women and girls around the world.

CSW was hugely impressive as an event. This year, it brought together over 6,000 representatives of the 193 Member States of the United Nations, as well as UN entities and about 400 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs from all regions of the world. SIE was one of them.

To a large extent, the many sessions I attended reiterated the opening words of the UN Secretary General regarding the important task ahead of us, and stressed the idea that it lies within our power as NGOs, as representatives of civil society, to continue to be the voices of the women and girls whose human rights are being breached.

A message that we all know very well was repeated many times: being the 'voice' of women and girls cannot stop with the closing of CSW 58, it must be ongoing! We play an important role at the level of our own communities and countries in holding our leaders accountable for their commitments. What we do in our own communities, how we treat others at home or in the workplace are all sophisticated ways of advocating for gender equality! And that is a very important message for us all to take home.

Elena Savu, SIE Vice President Advocacy





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SHARED VALUES: MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS & SOROPTIMISM

Each year, the session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women is the highest level forum for women's organisations to collaborate. Our Soroptimist cause makes it imperative that we bring our advocacy work around the event's priority theme, such as this year's focus on the MDGs, to CSW. But because the scope of the MDGs is vast, as Soroptimists we need to find a way to translate high level issues into clear, immediate, and impactful messages. In contrast to the top-down approach of official declarations, the bottom-up perspective that Soroptimists bring appeals to the ideals of a grassroots movement aiming to make a difference in the everyday lives of women and girls.



This year's priority theme was a wonderful opportunity to do so because of the clear correspondence between the MDGs and SIE's programmatic objectives:

- 'increasing access to formal and non-formal learning opportunities' with MDG #2 of achieving universal primary education;
- 'improving access to economic empowerment and sustainable opportunities for the employment of women' and 'eliminating violence against women and girls' with MDG #3 of promoting gender equality through the empowerment of women;

- 'addressing the specific needs of women and girls by improving environmental sustainability and mitigating effects of climate change and disasters' with MDG #7 of ensuring environmental sustainability;
- 'ensuring women and girls have food security and access to the highest attainable standard of health care' with MDGs #1, #4, #5, #6 of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating disease.



The MDGs are transformative in that they give coherence and a definitive roadmap to the global development agenda but they are meaningless if they are not underpinned by the notion of gender equality. Next year, we will mark the 20th anniversary of the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing and will hold SI's 20th Convention in Istanbul. It is therefore of utmost importance that we use 2015 to get the MDG messages from CSW 58 across to all our members.

Governments must enforce societies built on the principle of gender equality and proactively intervene to improve the status of women. Developing legal systems that openly acknowledge the disadvantages faced by women is the foremost practical and lasting approach to start with. To that end, it is essential for us Soroptimists to push high-profile international institutions and events such as CSW to put forward a perspective of positive discrimination for the achievement of the MDGs!

Emine Erdem, SIE Assistant Programme Director



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THE MDGs, WOMEN, AND THE POST-2015 AGENDA

Next year, 2015, will be an important year for women and for development: it will see us reach the target date of the MDGs and we will mark 20 years since the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. And yet two questions remain unanswered: What will be the new international development goals? And what place will women and girls secure in the new development agenda?

Throughout the two weeks of CSW 58, priority was given to these questions precisely. Numerous events organised by UN member states and civil society alike sought to make their contribution towards defining the “post-2015 agenda” and to ensure that a truly transformative push be made to achieve gender equality around the world.

In many cases, this ‘push’ meant calling for a ‘stand-alone goal’ on gender equality after 2015. UN Women, for instance, called for a [“transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women’s rights, and women’s empowerment.”](#)

So, what progress was made? The Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, dubbed the [Agreed conclusions](#) reached by UN member states at the end of CSW 58, [“a milestone towards a transformative global development agenda that puts the empowerment of women and girls at its centre \[which will act as\] valuable guidance as the international community devises a comprehensive post-2015 agenda.”](#)

The [Report of the Secretary General](#) published in December 2013 in the lead up to CSW 58 presents the few achievements and the many failings of the MDGs for women and girls – goal by goal, target by target. It does so in a nuanced way that looks at the realities of women and girls hidden within the many statistics that show overall progress on the MDGs. It shows systematically that the question of gender equality underpins ALL development goals and that none of them can be achieved in a profound or lasting way until women stand equal to men.

Thus, we must ask: Do the *Agreed conclusions* of CSW 58 go far enough? What do you think? We encourage you to make up your own mind!

Ana Barfield, SIE Programme and Advocacy Officer

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SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE





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UN, CSW, HRC, ECOSOC, MDGs... A GUIDE THROUGH THE ACRONYM JUNGLE!

This article is an attempt to provide a brief summary of the key institutions involved in dealing with women's issues at the global level, as well as their roles, their structure, the complex way in which they are interlinked, and how NGOs such as Soroptimist can engage with them to influence the global women's agenda.

The **United Nations (UN)** is the overall umbrella organisation whose role is articulated around four purposes: 1) to keep peace throughout the world; 2) to develop friendly relations between nations; 3) to work together to help people live better lives, to eliminate poverty, disease and illiteracy in the world, to stop the destruction of the environment, to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms, and 4) to be the centre for helping nations achieve these aims. Today, 193 states are members of the UN.

Following the issuing of the *Millennium Declaration* in 2000, the United Nations defined eight **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** as the priority areas for development at the global level (see icons).

ECOSOC stands for **Economic and Social Council** of the United Nations. It looks after global challenges whether they be economic, social, or environmental. This body grants consultative status to NGOs. SI, SIE and SIGBI hold General and Special Consultative Status, respectively. It is within this context and structure that Soroptimists have the right, and the obligation, to get involved. ECOSOC holds its annual session in alternate years in New York and Geneva.

UN Women is the main UN entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. Every year, UN Member State representatives gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards, and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. Soroptimists actively participate in this annual session.

CEDAW stands for the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**. It is the main international convention on women's rights. Almost all UN Member States have adopted it meaning that they have committed themselves to abolishing all discriminatory laws and adopting laws that are grounded in the principle of gender equality. CEDAW holds its sessions at the UN Office in Geneva three times a year. SIE recently began working closely with the CEDAW Committee.

The **Human Rights Council (HRC)** is the inter-governmental body of the UN responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world and for addressing situations of violations of human rights, including trafficking and violence against women. Last year, the *Agreed conclusions* of CSW 57 highlighted the need to have Violence Against Women included as part of the international human rights agenda, something that the HRC is actively pursuing.

Importantly, in addition to the SI UN Reps, several members of the SIE Board now also hold annual accreditations to the United Nations in Geneva and will have the opportunity to lead the visit to the UN for Programme Directors participating in the Training Seminar that will be taking place in Geneva at the end of May.





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A FEW WORDS WITH...

FRANÇOISE FERREY, SIE REP TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Bintou Koïta, SIE Programme & Advocacy Assistant, sat down with one of SIE’s Reps to the Council of Europe to discuss the CoE and CSW 58.

SIEHQ: How do you see the contribution of the Council of Europe to this year’s CSW?

Françoise: The CoE, working hand in hand with the UN and CSW has been at the forefront of the battle against gender-based violations of human rights. It is currently promoting measures for the early entry into force of the *Istanbul Convention*. During CSW, a side event was co-organised by the CoE and the permanent mission of Austria to the UN called *Action against trafficking in Human Beings – a severe form of violence against women and girls and a flagrant violation of human rights*. In another side event, the Conference of INGOs of the CoE, represented by Anje Wiersinga (International Alliance of Women), voiced their fight against gender-based violence as a political weapon.

SIEHQ: Is the CoE satisfied with the Agreed conclusions of CSW? Why?

Françoise: I think yes because they both share the same goals. At the end of the 58th Session, CSW adopted *Agreed conclusions* on “Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”. It reaffirmed CSW’s commitment to the full and effective implementation of the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*,

to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and also reiterated that gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, the enjoyment of their human rights, and the eradication of poverty are essential to economic and social development, including the achievement of all Millennium Development Goals. All these issues are what the CoE has been campaigning and fighting for for a long time.



SIEHQ: Do you have any suggestions on how to keep improving the experience of our SIE representatives at CSW future sessions of CSW?

Françoise: The active

participation of NGOs is a critical element in the work of CSW: NGOs have been influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women’s empowerment and gender equality. As President Ulla Madsen put it, “SIE must become an even stronger voice for women at the local, national and international levels (at the UN and within European institutions)... and an even more effective actor on the ground.”

I think SIE has been doing quite well so far through Advocacy but how else could it make itself better known and more active in that “fascinating and challenging event”? Organising a side event with one or two SIE experts – we have so many highly competent women in SIE! — could be a rewarding approach.

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GET INVOLVED:

HELP DEFINE THE BEIJING+20 WOMEN'S AGENDA!

NORDIC FORUM – NEW ACTION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS (JUNE 2014)



Together with representatives of 200 different women's organisations from the Nordic countries, and many others from around the world, Soroptimists will be participating in a four-day conference entitled *Nordic Forum – New Action on Women's Rights* in Sweden this June.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the *Nordic Forum* will focus on women's rights through a series of seminars, debates and exhibitions that aim to gather 15,000 participants. The event will be taking place in Malmö, Sweden, between June 12th and 15th this year.

Soroptimists from Nordic countries will be holding a joint seminar with the participation of SI President Ann Garvie and SIE President Ulla Madsen, and will organise an exhibition about Soroptimism.

You too are invited to participate in this important advocacy effort that will contribute to shaping the future Nordic and international women's agenda! For more details and to register, please go to www.nf2014.org.

We thank Birgitta Hansson, President of the Swedish Union 2012-2014, for extending this invitation!

UN ECE REGIONAL REVIEW (NOVEMBER 2014)

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women and its partners are organising an NGO Forum between November 3rd and 5th in Geneva as part of the UN ECE (UN Economic Commission for Europe) Regional Review of Beijing+20. The NGO Forum will look at progress made on the implementation of the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* as well as current challenges and emerging women's issues.



This is a powerful opportunity for Soroptimists from across Europe to add their voices to the future women's agenda! Similarly to CSW, the outcomes of the NGO Forum will "feed into the ECE Regional Review process and contribute to the Global Beijing+20 Report, as well as the post-MDG agenda."

For more information and to pre-register, please go to www.ngocsw-geneva.ch.



We thank Wilfrida Hendrickx, SI Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, for the recommendation!

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35,000 SOROPTIMISTS ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS!

Stop human trafficking!

On March 7th, the **Soroptimist International Club of Targoviste, Romania**, organised a hand chain in the centre Targoviste to "Stop Human Trafficking". The gathering was part of a larger, ongoing project of the Club entitled "Trafficking can be prevented" which seeks to inform young girls and women about the dangers of trafficking.

The event was launched as an advocacy project and counted 54 participants (students, Club members, friends, and passers-by!). It meant to draw the attention of the local authorities and of the public to the danger of human trafficking and to insist on the fact that human trafficking should be a tireless and peaceful struggle for human rights.



Survey on violence against women

To raise awareness on violence against women and girls and obtain relevant statistics to better understand the issue, the **Soroptimist Union of Madagascar** implemented a survey on VAW that was distributed to all Soroptimist Clubs in Madagascar and to the private sector. The purpose of this survey was to raise awareness and to enable women to express themselves freely. It sought to break the silence on violence against women and to investigate, in a concrete way, the different types of violence faced by women. The response to the survey was impressive: 240 questionnaires were received and analysed by the Union!

Children's rights

To prevent violence and abuse of children and to help them participate in conflict resolution, **Turkish Soroptimists from the Club in Pendik** organised a series of meetings. They gathered local women in

five different regions of Istanbul to participate in awareness raising lectures given by psychologists and lawyers. The main aim of the speeches was to give parents the capacity to educate their children on how to protect themselves from abuse and violence and to explain their legal rights to them.



Educating girls on violence against women

In collaboration with the *Office National de la Famille et de la Population*, the **Club of Tunis Fondateur** organised an awareness raising evening that benefitted 51 girl students in Tunis. Defining different types of violence was the first step of the event. Then a movie provided by the *Office National* about VAW was screened. A debate with key civil society actors followed, as well as a lecture by a renowned lawyer who is a member of the Association of Women jurists in Tunisia.



Lobbying against gender-based violence

In response to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, **Italian Soroptimists from Como** decided to send a strong message that would reach as many people as possible, especially women. They prepared a huge Soroptimist banner that contained a national phone number and a website address, both of which are contacts for support services for women who have been victims of gender-based violence. The banner hung above one of the busiest streets in Como, in front of the Court House, for several days.



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THE SOROPTIMIST STUDY: UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACROSS EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

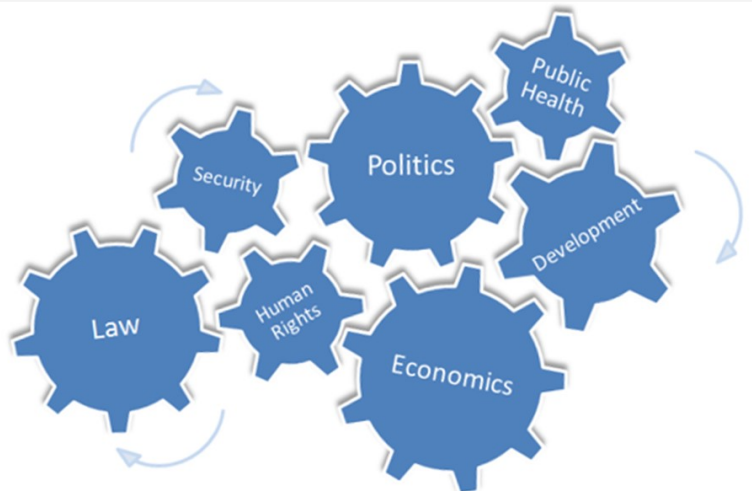
As recently announced by President Ulla to Union and Single Club Presidents, a major qualitative study on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is about to be launched throughout our Federation. The study will focus on **people's perceptions and experiences of violence** and will pinpoint different risk factors at various points in a woman's life. The results will be analysed at numerous levels, including at **country level**, and will serve as tools for policy-makers, service-sector officials, NGOs, civil society associations, and individuals who work on developing **prevention strategies**.

An SIE Advisory Council was recently created for the study. It includes Marie-Jeanne Bosia (Past President of SIE and SI),

Maria Luisa Frosio (SIE Extension Chair), Renata Trottmann Probst (SIE C&BL Chair), Flavia Pozzolini (Past President SI Italy), Gerda Rosiers (President SI Belgium), Sigrid Ag (Past President SI Norway), all of whom are actively involved in women's issues.

SIE took **CSW 58 in New York** as an opportunity to finalise the approach and methodology for the study. Renata Trottmann and Anne Simon met with several senior representatives of UN Women, The World Bank, The European Women's Lobby, The Open Society Foundations, as well as **CEDAW** Committee Members who all gave invaluable feedback. With the expert guidance of Judge Silvana Arbia, former Registrar of the International Criminal Court in The Hague and SIE Peace Prize winner, the project is shaping up well! We hope it will not only fully address one of our key Programme Objectives, **combating Violence Against Women**, but also engage Programme Teams from many SIE Clubs.

Understanding VAWG in its full complexity means understanding its **interconnectedness with politics, law, economics, human rights, gender...**





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NEWS FROM OUR REPS!

BETTINA HAHNE SENDS NEWS FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE:

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE: The CoE is creating a new Steering Committee on democratic governance that will cover many issues of importance to Soroptimists including gender equality, children's rights, and the advancement of the *Istanbul Convention*! Importantly, the Committee takes into account civil society contributions through the Conference of INGOs.

ISTANBUL CONVENTION: Our CoE Rep, Bettina Hahne, tells us "We should all promote the *Istanbul Convention* so that it will finally be adopted – two more ratifications are needed for this to happen!" The convention has been signed by 32 countries but ratified by only 8. However, 10 ratifications are necessary for the convention to come into force. Countries that have ratified are: Albania, Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Italy, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, and Turkey. You can click [here](#) to see the full list of signatories and check if your country is one of them!

EXPERT COUNCIL ON NGO LAW: The CoE's Expert Council on NGOs helps NGOs learn about their rights and push to change legislation where needed. The Council can help advise your Club/Union or future SIE Clubs/Unions, particularly in countries where restrictions to NGO activities might apply!

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A working group of the CoE drafted a [statement](#) on gender-based violence as a political weapon in the Arab region, asking for women to be involved in the Syrian peace process and condemning violence against women in the Arab region.

FRANÇOISE FERÉY WRITES TO US FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE:

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe held a debate entitled "Violence against Women, the Council of Europe response" on March 19th this year. The debate was the occasion to launch a [study](#) on the implementation of measures for the protection of women against violence in CoE member states.

At the debate, the Secretary General of the CoE, Thorbjørn Jagland, pointed out the importance of the *Istanbul Convention* "as the most powerful standard yet for addressing the extensive problem of violence against women."

He also highlighted the following alarming facts the study found:

- Only one of the nine forms of violence against women that should be penalised - physical violence - is criminalised by all the member states of the CoE.
- Only four member states have national policies that address all nine forms of violence against women.
- The majority of member states are not able to provide figures regarding the allocation of sufficient financial resources to address the problem of violence against women.
- In about a third of member states, the provision of shelter beds for women and children victims of domestic violence is very low.
- The provision of specialised services for women victims of sexual violence is still lagging for victims of domestic violence.

All the more reason to promote the signing and ratification of the *Istanbul Convention* in your country!



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IRENA COUFALOVA WRITES TO US FROM THE OSCE:

The OSCE is marking the 10th anniversary of its 2004 *Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Equality*, which has as its priority areas the prevention of violence against women and encouraging women's participation in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction.

And yet, in the words of Ambassador Miroslava Beham, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues of the OSCE, "One of the areas where assistance in all forms is still needed in all participating States is combating violence against women. The European Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee [estimates] that the economic annual cost of violence against women in the EU amounts to 228 billion Euros. This is an incredible figure compared to the annual OSCE budget of around 150 million Euros, and it relates to only about half of the OSCE participating States."

In 2014, the OSCE must therefore redouble its efforts and develop more efficient cooperation with member countries, which includes the collection of relevant data to inform effective policies.

FURTHER READING!

ELENA SAVU, THE REPS & THE WHOLE SIE ADVOCACY TEAM RECOMMEND SOME FURTHER READING:

The Guardian newspaper's [campaign](#) against **female genital mutilation**

The Global Fund for Women's [campaign](#) against **forced and child marriage**

The European Women's Lobby's [campaign](#) against **prostitution**

Eurostat's [news release](#) on **European gender issues**

HAVE COMMENTS?

This is YOUR newsletter! If you have a comment, document, link, or anything else that you would like us to communicate in an upcoming edition of the newsletter, please share it with us! Feel free to send your news to programme@soroptimisteurope.org. The Advocacy Newsletter will come out four times per year.

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