



01/02 2017

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY TEAM!



Dear Soroptimists,

Since Dr Suzanne Noël, with her boundless energy, founded our organization in Europe, health has been a central pillar of our project work. Today, despite all the progress made in women's health globally, our work in this area is far from done. There are still more than 200 million women and girls in the world who have undergone female genital mutilation. Young women still withstand the worst of the HIV epidemic. And an astonishing 1 in 3 women under the age of 50 have suffered sexual violence. This reminds us: health is not just about improving medical infrastructure and better trained medical staff. It's about girls' education, laws that safeguard women's sexual and reproductive rights, and the prevention of violence against women. It's about gender equality. Today, we continue to draw inspiration from Dr Noël and strive to improve not only women's health but their physical and psychological wellbeing. Learn more by reading this issue!

Renata Trottmann Probst, President Elect and head 'Programme & Advocacy'

This month we talk about: HEALTH

IN THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Page 1 : Gender & Health
- ◆ Page 2: Stop the press—SIE Scholarships
- ◆ Page 3: Series of "My vision"
- ◆ Page 3: The power of sisterhood—My Book Buddy
- ◆ Page 4: Highlights of recent projects conducted by Soroptimists
- ◆ Page 5 Advocacy— International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM
- ◆ Page 5: News from our Reps
- ◆ Page 6: Country focus—Lithuania
- ◆ Pages 7-8: General News



GENDER & HEALTH



Soroptimists have known for a long time that when **women are educated and when they can earn and control their own income,** infant

mortality declines; child health and nutrition improve; agricultural productivity rises; population growth slows; economies expand, and cycles of poverty are broken.

We have also always advocated for gender equality. In recent times we have been learning a new axiom of the two above mentioned truths, and

that is that **gender inequality affects health and that health public policies are usually based on gender inequality.** Not only in low or moderately developed countries, as we would have expected, but also in the most developed areas of the world.

Women and girls tend to have unequal power in sexual relationships, economic decision-making, and access to health information and services, all of which greatly influence their vulnerability to disease. Gender inequalities are a strong driver of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Globally, adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years are twice more likely to be at risk of HIV infection than boys and young men in the same age group. Among adult **women between the ages of 20 and**

01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

59 in low-income countries, tuberculosis is one of the five leading causes of death. And, in Africa, an estimated 10,000 women and 200,000 of their infants die annually as a result of malaria infection during pregnancy¹.

In order to reverse this situation and the above mentioned statistics, **the Global Fund is working to empower civil society organisations, including organisations of women** who are living with or are directly affected by the three diseases, by conducting comprehensive training on gender issues, identifying capacity gaps, and providing technical assistance.

Many of our Clubs are working along these same lines and I congratulate them. I hope they will join forces with the International Organisations who are fighting this particular battle because, as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated at the 2012 Global Health Summit, '[...] improving women's health has dividends for entire societies'.

Resources

- Download the report [Women's Lives and Challenges: Equality and Empowerment Since 2000](#) [PDF, 13MB].
- Learn more about [International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation](#).
- Visit the [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) section.

¹ Derrick, D. (8 August, 2014) Empowering women and girls: the impact of gender equality on public health *The Lancet Global Health Blog* [online] available at <http://globalhealth.thelancet.com/2014/08/08/empowering-women-and-girls-impact-gender-equality-public-health>

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, SIE President

STOP THE PRESS



A SIE Survey on Scholarships and Mentoring
How Soroptimists are changing the lives of women and girls for the better? One way is by giving them the resources they need to improve their education, skills, and employment prospects. Last year the European Federation disbursed through the Scholarship Fund an amount of about € 120.000. The

amount is determined by the number of members, if the membership decreases so does the yearly disbursement, but we know that an enormous amount of money is given for the same purposes in different forms by Unions, clubs within Unions and Single clubs.

Have your say. Make a difference. Unions and Single Clubs throughout the Federation have received an invitation to participate in a survey about their activities in the area of **Scholarships & Mentoring** over the past two years (01/10/2014 - 30/09/2016). The survey was prepared by the Scholarship Committee and, based on the outcome, SIE will have not only a powerful tool to increase its visibility in the outside world but also an opportunity to identify "best practices" within our Unions and club.

Why it is important to participate? Your responses are important for evaluating the global impact of all scholarships, grants, mentoring activities and prizes awarded within Soroptimist International of Europe. The data gathered will provide insights on less known Soroptimist achievements and further educational programs and strategies within the area of Goal 1-Programme.

The survey is in two parts. The first part is dedicated to **Scholarships** and refers only to the scholarships/grants/prizes that were offered by your Union (and its clubs) or Single Club directly and do NOT include SIE scholarships. The second part concerns **Mentoring programs**.

Deadline. The survey needs to be completed by 28 February 2017. This will give the Scholarship Committee and SIEHQ enough time to collect the data, to analyze them and to prepare a report to be discussed at the Meeting of the Governors in Florence next July.

Applications for SIE Scholarships for 2017-2018 are open!

SIE continues to empower women and girls through education opportunities. We hope to receive a high number of applications from excellent candidates (do not forget the STEM girls) from both Unions and Single Clubs. Please remember that **the deadline for online applications is 15 February 2017**

Maria Luisa Frosio, SIE Scholarship Committee Chair



01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS



SERIES OF “MY VISION”...

For this issue we have the testimony of **SIE VP Extension Africa, Emine Erdem.**

“A spirit of service defines the character of the Soroptimist movement. Being a Soroptimist is more than an institutional affiliation. The values of our organization form the basis of a worldview. We think globally, and we act out of concern for the local. In confronting the issue of women’s empowerment, the backbone of our ability to problem-solve is our grassroots mobility. Our top priority is managing projects in a creative and enlightened manner, so that they make a lasting improvement to people’s lives. Our responsiveness stems from a structural flexibility to address the needs of women and girls in terms of local differences at a global scale.

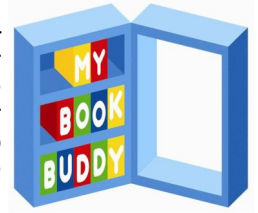


The international Soroptimist sisterhood of activists utilizes the power of women for the common social good. This visionary activism rests on our values of networking, solidarity and awareness. We aim to push back the limits of women’s leadership by enabling them to stand on their own two feet. From the foundation of the first Soroptimist club through to the present day, Soroptimists have striven to achieve ‘the best for women’ in practical terms. We want emancipation for women with an equal voice in the creation of strong and peaceful communities worldwide. We aspire after a world where women and girls achieve their collective and individual potential.

It was my mother who initiated me into the Soroptimist philosophy. She was a member of the strong Soroptimist generation in Turkey headed by Sadun Katipoğlu, SI President ‘85-’87. From them I have learnt perseverance against all odds, loyalty to community and efficiency in service as the key characteristics of a Soroptimist. A sense of social duty, ethics and personal dignity are inspirations for all Soroptimists in civil society. My individual Soroptimist motivation has always been to lead social change by making a difference to women’s lives. In retrospect, after serving our organization for almost 30 years, I now realize how being a Soroptimist has made a difference in my own life. Befriending hundreds of sisters with the same ideals working towards the same goals, the Soroptimist world has expanded my vision and given my heart a sense of purpose, one larger than life. “

THE POWER OF SISTERHOOD!

Dear Soroptimists, I believe in the power of working together – all 34,000 members of our federation with all the programme directors of our 1,265 clubs and Unions – to really make a difference in the lives of girls who urgently need books to improve their literacy and to create opportunities for their future in our 63 countries!



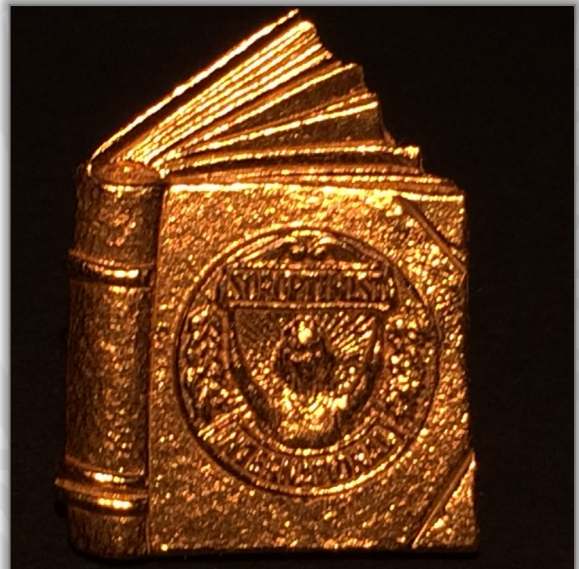
We have received applications for 15 schools now, which means 200 numbers of bookcases for a total 4000 Girls!

Imagine all these children getting the opportunity to have access to books, bring them proudly home and involve the whole family in reading! Imagine that on 8 September 2017 Soroptimist International of Europe has the honour to speak at the UN Literacy Day at UNESCO in Paris and we can tell the world that we Soroptimists have taken responsibility to give so many girls the chance to read and be literate and make their dreams come true!

Imagine if all the Soroptimists in our SIE federation gave 1 euro for this project and asked all your family and friends to support you with this gesture, how many children could benefit from this fantastic opportunity?

Let’s connect to each other and feel the pride of being one big organisation that can create a difference! See: <https://sie-mybookbuddy.org>

My wish for 2017 is that we all work closely together with our Programme Directors in Unions and Clubs and that our 34,000 members really are going to make the dreams possible of so many girls!



Marlène van Benthem, SIE Programme Director



01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

35,000 SOROPTIMISTS ARE ENGAGED IN PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY

SI Antanarivo Tanamasoandro, Madagascar

70% of cancer victims globally are currently found in developing countries, who have access to only 5% of the resources available to treat them.

In this context, SI Union Madagascar, SI Club Saint Denis de la Réunion and SI Club Antanarivo Tanamasoandro joined forces to organize a common project of mass screenings for cervical and breast cancer.

The action took place in May 2016 at the Mère et Enfant Ambohimandra Antanarivo Hospital, in Madagascar. An awareness-raising session on early screening by breast self-examination and on what lifestyle to lead in order to minimize cancer risks took place.

Of 118 screened women, 20 were declared VIA positive, there were 4 cases of suspected cervical cancer, and 4 cases of breast cancer, one of which at an advanced stage.

“Screening is a chance!” said one participant. Indeed, screening allows early cancer diagnosis and its treatment at an early stage, which increases chances of recovery.



SI Land Van Waas, Belgium

Looking for inspiration on Valentine’s day?

In February 2016, Soroptimists of the Belgian Union let their hearts speak for a good cause. Clubs all over the country joined forces for a nation-wide awareness raising campaign on the importance of organ, blood and stem-cell donation.

Their strategy to spread the word? Soroptimist clubs from all over Belgium coordinated for a common action. A text about organ-, blood-, and stem-cell donation was written and printed on 25 000 bread bags. They were then distributed to local bakeries all over the country.

Bread being a daily commodity, this was a clever way to spread the word widely and to deliver a powerful message encouraging Belgians to register as organ donors on Valentine’s day.

Since 2012, Soroptimists from Belgium have consistently come up with original ways to raise awareness about this topic: by carrying out information campaigns in hospitals, schools, public places (such as markets, supermarkets, townhalls) and during the Red Cross’ blood collections.



In 2013, the Council of Europe congratulated Belgium for multiplying its number of registered donors by five since 2005.

SI Cotonou Doyen, Benin

In Benin, the rate of school absenteeism due to parasitic diseases (stomach pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and cold) is high. The emergence of the Lassa virus, together with the resurgence of the Ebola virus in Guinea-Conakry at the beginning of last year, have put emphasis on the necessity for a large awareness raising and information campaign on the importance of proper hand hygiene.

On International Water Day, the Single Club of Cotonou Doyen provided the Public Primary School of Yolomahouto with nine hand-wash basins. The Soroptimists then led a sensitization and instruction session on the basins’ maintenance for the directors of the three school groups.

On March 22nd, 2016, they then exchanged with the students and teachers on the negative consequences of bad hand hygiene.

Students were very enthusiastic, during the discussion and also while using the basins. A student in her 6th year of primary school thanked the Club for their gesture. **“The hand-wash basins will allow us to be healthy!”** she said before wishing a long life to the Soroptimists.





01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

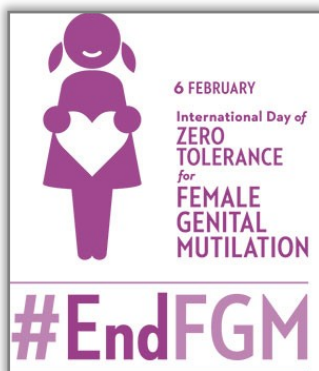
ADVOCACY

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO TOLERANCE FOR FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, 6 FEBRUARY



"The Sustainable Development Goals contain a specific target calling for an end to FGM. When this practice is fully abandoned, positive effects will reverberate across societies as girls and women reclaim their health, human rights and vast potential." says the UN Secretary-General.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical reasons and is recognised internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women and girls. The practice also violates their rights to health, security and physical integrity, their right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as their right to life when the procedure results in death.



Let us, Soroptimists across Europe help promote the abandonment of FGM as coordinated and systematic efforts are needed. Let us follow the advice of the UN Secretary General and engage our communities to focus on human rights and gender equality.

Sigrid AG, Vice President Advocacy

NEWS FROM OUR REPS

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEBRUARY 6TH?



An estimated **125 to 140 million women and girls** worldwide are victims of FGM.

Despite FGM being classified as a human rights violation by the World Health Organization, it still happens to thousands of vulnerable women and girls every day.

Most girls undergo FGM between infancy and 15 years of age. FGM can cause severe pain, infertility, infection, and prolonged bleeding. It can also cause complications during childbirth and increases the risk of newborn deaths. Communities practice FGM mostly for cultural reasons. Since it is such a powerful social norm, most families will have their daughters cut despite the health risks and harm.

Though FGM is a universal problem that happens all over the world, it is primarily concentrated in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East. In European countries, it is illegal, though with increasing immigration, more and more clandestine FGM is being carried out.

A member of the **SI Club Bruxelles Doyen** is a survivor of FGM in her native country, Burkina Faso. **Assita Kanko**, a journalist and politician, is very outspoken about women's rights and does not hide her personal experience. In February 2014, she gave an interview for Paris Match about her book **'Because you are a girl. Story of a circumcised life.'** She says: 'FGM means cutting of relationships, not just cutting of the body.' She further adds that being lied to by her mother and taken under a false pretense to be 'cut', completely destroyed her trust in her parents. The psychological damage, the shame, the lack of confidence in her parents and the secrecy all made it extremely difficult to accept what had happened to her.

She estimates that every year about 180 000 girls become victims of FGM in Europe, about 2000 in Belgium alone.

What can Soroptimists do?

- We can raise awareness of this practice and its terrible consequences.
- We can invite speakers to inform our club members about FGM.
- We can try to educate migrant populations, who might want to bring this practice into our countries, making them understand that FGM is a human rights violation and has no place in our culture.
- Members of SIE who are in the medical profession should be involved in awareness raising against FGM.
- We can start fundraising to help support existing projects, some of which are in SIE countries:

Renate Smith-Kubat, SIE Representative to EWL



01/02 2017

COUNTRY FOCUS LITHUANIA



In 2015 and 2016, Lithuanian Soroptimist Clubs launched the Action Fund project **“Women and Youth: Social Leaders and Actors of Development in Lithuania”**. The project was implemented in five areas:

- Education & Heritage by the Clubs of Raseiniai and Klaipėda.
- Economic empowerment: by the Clubs of Vilnius Old Town and Alytus.
- Health: by the Clubs of Vilnius 1st and Panevezys.
- Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls: by the Union of Lithuania, the Club of Kaunas and the Faculties of Economics and Management, and of Diplomacy and International Relations at Vytautas Magnus University.

Sustainable Environment - “Go Green”: by the Pasvalys Club (in collaboration with the Pasvalys Area Museum) and the Silute Club with the Child Care Home in Saugos

I would love to share with you two best practices from the work carried out by the Panevezys and the Vilnius 1st SIE Clubs as part of the Action Fund Project.



The Vilnius 1st Club organised a visit to the Preterm Infant Unit at the Neonatology Department of the Children’s Hospital and took part in a roundtable discussion with the staff of Vilnius University Hospital

Santariskiu Klinikos. They discussed the problems experienced by the unit and donated socks that had been knitted by Club members. They decided to donate EUR 500 to the unit for the purchase of medical equipment necessary for the care of premature babies. The Children’s Hospital expressed its gratitude for the financial and in-kind donations, which will greatly improve the quality of healthcare provided to patients.



In April 2016, to mark World Health Day, lectures and practical training sessions were organised in the town of Panevezys to teach people the importance of healthy lifestyles which attracted more than 105 people. The famous Lithuanian pharmacist and herbalist Mr. Virgilijus Skirkevicus took part in the event and free gifts - herbal packs prepared by the Sisters of Panevezys Club – were distributed to participants. The event attracted the attention of local TV and newspapers, whose reporting before and after the event helped to spread the healthy living message to an even wider audience.

Actions:

Laima Jonkuvienė, the newly elected President of the Union of Lithuania, launched the President’s Theme: “Soroptimist Invest in Health”. She received very positive feedback from the Clubs and Board of the SIE clubs Union of Lithuania. Lectures, practical workshops and seminars will be organised, not only for the members of SIE Clubs Union of Lithuania but also for the wider public. Understanding the



importance of a healthy lifestyle and how to it can help one to remain in employment or in an active role within ones community, will improve lives of women and girls and raise the visibility of our organisation in Lithuanian society.

Laima Jonkuvienė, President of SI Lithuania



01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

GENERAL NEWS

BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2017



This year again, your Federation wants to reward the best projects and thus pay tribute to your work and your commitment to improving the lives of women and girls. We will be giving out 7 awards: one **Project of the Year**, one "Educate to Lead Award" and one Awards for each of five Programme Objectives. The winning projects will be announced in July 2017 in Florence, Italy.

Each Union/Club/Single Club is eligible to submit two projects. Each project that is submitted should correspond to one of the following five Programme Objectives: Education, Economic Empowerment, Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls, Health, Sustainable Environment. The deadline for submission is **March 20, 2017**. On the private area of the public website www.soroptimisteurope.org you will find all detailed information and a registration form.

Come and share the best of your projects. They will inspire other Soroptimists, generate perhaps collaborations and also increase the visibility of our organization. We look forward to hearing from you.

PHOTO COMPETITON 2017

You have recently received a call of participation to the fourth edition of the Soroptimist International of Europe Photo Competition entitled *Through the Eyes of Soroptimists*.



We are eager to receive many excellent photos from you this year as well. If you have any questions about the process or haven't received the form, make sure you contact the SIE Programme Team at [programme\[at\]soroptimisteurope.org](mailto:programme[at]soroptimisteurope.org).

You can also download the form from the SIE members' area. Just log in, click on "**Downloads**", then on "**Programme & Advocacy**", and then on "**Photo Competition 2017**".

All submissions must be in by **April 23rd 2017**.

We look forward to hearing from many of you!

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE 21ST CONGRESS IN FLORENCE!



The Soroptimist International of Europe 21st Congress will take place in **Florence, Italy on 14-16 July 2017**.

We invite you to visit the updated website where you will have access to relevant information on the event, details of the registration, information on the "excellences" of Florence and many more:

<http://www.soroptimistflorence2017.com>

You can also "like" the dedicated Facebook page, by clicking [HERE](#)





01/02 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

GENERAL NEWS

INVEST IN A SCHOLARSHIP!

Invest in a Scholarship! and give a woman or a girl the opportunity to realise her dreams and potential. The grant will be attributed to a female student interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

Our biennium theme is “**Soroptimist Invest in Education**” and surely, education is one of the greatest gifts we can give to the next generation - with your help we can make this a reality!

Show your solidarity, your support will truly make a difference!

Please make your donation as follow:

If your bank account is in the Euro zone
CREDIT AGRICOLE DES SAVOIE, 74160 Saint Julien en G – France

Beneficiary: **Soroptimist International of Europe**

SWIFT OR BIC: **AGRIFRPP881** (=BANK IDENTIFICATION CODE)

IBAN: **FR76 1810 6000 3496 7040 0803 955**

If your bank account is outside the Euro zone
UBS, CH – 2001 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Beneficiary: **Soroptimist International of Europe**

SWIFT OR BIC: **UBSWCHZH80A** (=BANK IDENTIFICATION CODE)

IBAN: **CH30 0029 0290 IN10 5239 0**

- Always write precisely **whom** the payment comes from (Club, Union SI...)
- Always write precisely what it is intended for (ex: Invest in a Scholarship)

Thank you very much!



IMPORTANT DATES

- Feb 6** International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation
- Mar 1** Zero Discrimination Day
- Mar 8** International Women’s Day
- Mar 21** International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

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

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