



Soroptimist International of Europe is an organisation of 35,000 professional women across 60 countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Together with our sister organisation, Soroptimist International of the Americas, we count 68,000 members and have an active presence in 45 countries of the ECE region.

Each year, Soroptimists conceptualise and implement thousands of projects to better the lives of women and girls in their communities in concrete and lasting ways. Our work is closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the *Beijing Platform for Action* and focuses on education, economic empowerment, elimination of violence against women (VAW), health, and sustainable environment.

Experience teaches us that VAW undermines progress in all other areas and is *the* most severe impediment to the achievement of gender equality. Since 1921, Soroptimists have been building shelters, helping victims of violence, providing counselling services, and advocating for improved prevention programs and policies. Today Soroptimist International of Europe and of the Americas

- Call on the United States government to ratify the *CEDAW Convention* and on European governments to ratify the Council of Europe's *Istanbul Convention*
- Recommend that the *Istanbul Convention*, the principles of the UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, UNSC Resolutions on sexual violence in conflict (1325, 1820) and CEDAW Recommendation 19, be used as a basis for the development of a UN-level convention for the eradication of VAW
- Encourage the replication of best practices in the area of prevention and mitigation of VAW, including those initiated by Soroptimists:
 - o Running a national campaign in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to build protected courtrooms so that victims of violence can give testimony without facing the perpetrator (56 protected courtrooms built in Italy over two years, saving the government EUR 7 million over next 5 years)
 - o Each year, awarding more than \$1.6 million in education grants called *Live Your Dream Education and Training Awards for Women* to more than 1,200 women who have escaped domestic violence in order to give them the resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects (USA & Canada)
 - o Fighting trafficking through awareness raising campaigns, exchanges of knowledge regarding prevention strategies, and country-wide educational campaigns in targeting vulnerable age groups and communities (joint initiative in Denmark & Romania)
- Recommend the increased promotion of the UN Secretary General's Database on Violence Against Women and its strengthening through the inclusion of best practices

To contribute to the development of effective, long-term and cost-effective prevention and response strategies and programs, Soroptimists are also embarking on what is one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken by a women's service organisation. This project will seek to generate understanding of the complex ways in which social, political, economic, cultural, and legal factors influence manifestations of VAW across 60 different countries. To bridge the gap between international policy-making and on-the-ground realities, Soroptimists will consult with victims of violence, key professionals working within the response chain, and global experts. The CEDAW Committee, the WHO and other renowned international experts have agreed to guide us. Soroptimists call on other NGOs and member states to join in this important initiative.