Who are Soroptimists?

Soroptimists are professional women who are actively engaged in their communities, who have a global vision of the world and of women’s issues, and who are in touch with local challenges for women, their conditions and their rights.

What are the key focus areas Soroptimists work in?
1. Education
2. Women’s Empowerment
3. Elimination of Violence Against Women
4. Health and Food Security
5. Sustainability

What are Soroptimist Clubs?
Soroptimists are organised into Clubs in their cities/towns/villages, each having approximately 30 members. All projects you will read about here are the work of one or several Clubs. Soroptimist Clubs have been around since 1921.

What are Soroptimist Unions?
When a country has more than 7 Clubs and at least 150 members it forms what’s called a Union. There are 21 Soroptimist Unions across Europe, the Middle East & the Caribbean.

How many members and Clubs are there in Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean?
Currently, 31,457 women are members of the 1,162 Soroptimist Clubs in this region! (Or 1,163 if you start the next one?)

How do Soroptimists advocate for women’s rights?
Soroptimist International of Europe holds special consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and participatory status at the Council of Europe and the European Women’s Lobby.

We are a real ‘global voice for women’!
Dear Soroptimists,

What an incredible year you have all had. It was a great honour to learn about how our clubs and Unions continue to change the world for the better through educating, empowering, and enabling women and girls.

You have stepped up in the face of COVID-19, and the obstacles that brings, to raise a remarkable €5,580,869 across 4,234 projects. Despite limited funds and more challenging circumstances, you have implemented life changing projects throughout the world. Today we honour all 4,234 projects and the many thousands of Soroptimist sisters who run them.

It is with great pride and happiness that we recognise seven outstanding Soroptimist projects in our Best Practice Award 2021. This year’s ceremony took place online again and we handed over awards on the stage with virtual applause from our clubs and members.

While it is true that the ceremony is virtual, our projects are real and very tangible. Each one embodies our purpose of advocating globally and acting locally. Their enormous impact is due to your local knowledge of what your communities need and your networks to make it happen. Our award-winning projects are united in the impact they have had on individuals and communities now and in the future, yet each is so very unique.

Thanks to the hard work of the Programme Team, Ingeborg Dietz, Inge Withof and Bintou Koïta, we have the chance to become inspired by one another’s projects and even replicate them. I would warmly recommend reading about them in this brochure and on our website, as well as reaching out to your Soroptimist sisters to offer support, congratulations and to share learnings.

Congratulations to our winners and to all our members for being a voice for women!

Always yours,

Anna Wszelaczyńska,
SIE President 2019-2021
Where there is a will to educate, empower and enable, there is always a way! And where there is a way, it is our responsibility to make it happen.

So many of our extraordinary clubs and Unions did make it happen over the past year, despite the very present global pandemic.

Living by our motto, ‘We Stand Up for Women’ our Soroptimist sisters have stood up for women in every way possible. We have learnt just how much when evaluating the 88 outstanding projects running for our Best Practice Awards (BPA) this year.

Soroptimist International of Europe’s Best Practice Awards 2021 puts the spotlight on the achievements of our members to help shape the lives of tomorrow’s women. The work they showcase illustrates a commitment to lifting the lives of women through sustainable projects – all of which are aligned with the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and our organisation’s objectives of:

- Education
- Women’s empowerment
- Violence against women (VAW)
- Health and food security
- Sustainability

These projects embody the message that gender equality is fundamental to prosperous and fair societies. Our clubs and Unions do this by encouraging women and girls to seek opportunities and fulfil their professional and personal aspirations.

This year’s awards have taken on a new dimension, due to the global pandemic. On behalf of our President, Anna Wzcelaczyńska, and the entire SIE Board, the jury is pleased to highlight the success of action our members have taken to relieve people from consequences caused and exacerbated by COVID-19.

We live in exceptional times, and exceptional times require special honours. As the SIE Programme Team, we felt touched to select three special award winners, in addition to the BPA, for the COVID-Prize, the Union Prize and the Special Biennium Prize 2019–2021.

Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is prouder than ever to celebrate our members being socio-politically active locally, nationally, and internationally. Our hope is that the awardees’ project successes will inspire you to fulfil your ambitions and continue to turn your project plans into reality.

Together, united by the Soroptimist spirit, we continue to build networks to help women and act as role models for the future.

With congratulations to you all from your sisters,

SIE Programme Team 2019-2021
Ingeborg Dietz, Programme Director
Inge Withof, Assistant Programme Director
Bintou Koïta, SIEHQ Senior Programme Officer

Jury 2021

Ingeborg Dietz
SIE Programme Director, Chair of the Jury

Inge Withof
SIE Assistant Programme Director

Vesselina Tzvetanova
SIE Vice President - Reorganisation/Development Eastern-Europe

Saija Kuusisto – Lancaster
SIE Vice President - Mentoring

Françoise Lathuille
SIE Vice President - E-Membership
Virtual, or e-Membership is the next generation tool that supports inclusivity and our organisation’s growth. It not only attracts new, tech-savvy members, but helps to retain members whose Club may have closed, as well as making it easier for members to remain active, even if they are unable to be physically involved in Club life.

The Italian Union and its President, Mariolina Coppola, saw the importance of embracing technology and drove the project forwards as its main sponsors. Soroptimist e-Club Milano Net Lead kicked off this revolutionary membership with an inauguration ceremony at the Bocconi University in Milan on 15th November 2019.

The first Soroptimist e-Club already exists. It is made up of a motivated and determined group of women, all under the age of 35, who won the Corso Bocconi 2019 ‘Female leadership’ award (initiated by the Soroptimist Union of Italy). Inspired by Soroptimist’s ideals, these driven, professional women decided to unite through an e-Club.

This network, with no territorial boundaries, focuses on education, female empowerment and leadership. The Italian Union has also implemented a Mentoring Programme, with 24 Italian Soroptimist Mentors encouraging the journey of the young Net Lead women through training and mentoring.

During their first year they carried out many innovative, and mainly virtual projects, focusing on knowledge and skill development, empowerment and female leadership. They also set up a video collection on education and training that tackles aspects of contemporaneity for high school students (14-18 years).

The network became a real Club on 16th January 2021 when the constituent assembly took place and SIE President Anna Wszelaczynska chartered the official foundation of the SI Club Milano Net Lead: the first virtual Soroptimist Club of the European Federation!

Soroptimist for the next generation of members - the e-Club
Union of Italy

It is crucial for Soroptimist International of Europe to facilitate membership to women who share our values, wherever they are and whatever their circumstances.

SPECIAL SIE BIENNMIUM AWARD 2020-2021

Project achieved by:
- Promoting digital membership
- Giving women a more flexible way to become/remain Soroptimists
- Targeting like-minded women, and highlighting remote membership

Women & girls reached: 35
Funds raised by the union: 2000€
Partner(s): Bocconi University - Milan

Links:
- https://www.soroptimist.it/it/notizie/fondazione-soroptimist-net-lead-31353/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6PZL5kYkD0
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Links:
Our Vision

We aim to build a community of young professional women that leads the change empowering talented businesswomen across the globe.
According to UNESCO, 45% of young people currently live below the poverty line globally. In addition, 123 million of them, (61% of them girls), are illiterate and therefore deprived of access to many opportunities. In a world of social and economic disparities, these factors limit their chances of growing up and contributing to the development of their country. The situation is even more worrying for young girls, who often face gender-based discrimination. They initiated ‘Spark’ - a coaching programme for the young scholars they mentor throughout the 35 clubs of the Turkish Union. The name was given to honour these young girls who begin as bright, promising sparks and, through coaching and hard work, become strong flames with promising futures. In collaboration with ICF Turkey (a Turkish coaching NGO), the Soroptimists selected students in their final year of university.

Objectives for the students:

- Realise their potential, gain confidence, strengthen their relationships, and assert their identity so that they can fully contribute to the development of their community,
- Enable them to become informed and committed citizens,
- Guarantee their economic autonomy,
- Empower them to become permanent and powerful actors of their own lives and progress toward their goals and dreams.

Running of the coaching programme:
- Two interactive workshops on teamwork were held, to reinforce and demonstrate the importance of teamwork in achieving success,
- Individual interviews were carried out with four girls, who were coached to discover their strengths; to increase their self-confidence and motivation; and to become successful in life,
- Certificates were given to each student which they can refer to in their CVs.

This project was conducted three times, once in 2019 and twice in 2020. The Soroptimists reached 89 scholars across Turkey. Due to its success and the high demand to take part, the Turkish Soroptimists have started organising its fourth edition, with 49 scholars.
The Soroptimists of Follo decided to act. Their goal was to educate and contain the spread of the virus within this sometimes-forgotten local foreign community. In collaboration with Voluntary Central, Sanitary Women and the Red Cross, they arranged a course to teach foreign women living in Norway about the infection control rules. Nineteen women were chosen as infection control ambassadors and trained by health professionals. The ambassadors were asked to educate their families, friends and communities on COVID-19 sanitation measures.

To carry out this project, the Soroptimists:
• Raised funds by applying to The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi),
• Selected and hired professional trainers,
• Facilitated the course and meetings,
• Arranged a follow-up course.

More than a hundred people have benefited from this project, thanks to the work of the female ambassadors. The Soroptimists’ efforts were recognised by the Mayor of Follo and they were presented with the ‘Passion Award’.

This Soroptimist initiative is not only crucial to remove obstacles aimed at protecting the most vulnerable populations, but also necessary to promote an equal and efficient recovery from COVID-19.

Education of infection control ambassadors
Club of Follo - NORWAY

We need stronger solidarity than ever to face the COVID-19 pandemic and aid those in the most precarious situations. However, solidarity is not easy when a large number of the foreign population living in Norway does not master the national language and is therefore unfamiliar with the recommendations imposed by the health crisis.

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EDUCATION

Increase access to learning opportunities
Soroptimists educate women and girls to lead

TOP PROJECT
No more war! From victory to peace
Club of Lauterbach-Vogelsberg - GERMANY

RUNNERS-UP:
1. Illuminating books with Braille writing
   Soroptimists from Volos Thetis, Greece
   Replenishment of Braille books from a library dedicated to the visually impaired and donation of four Braille typewriters for their workshops.

2. Empowering women of foreign origin in their studies to become licenced practical nurses
   Soroptimists from Reykjavik, Iceland
   Support women of foreign origin with Icelandic language and terminology in their studies to become licenced practical nurses.

3. Free distribution of a youth album in schools
   Soroptimists from Foix, France (in collaboration with 116 French clubs)
   Free distribution of a youth album that promotes gender equality by combating stereotypes through education and awareness and which is aimed at children aged from 6 to 8.
Top Project

No more war! From victory to peace
Club of Lauterbach-Vogelsberg - GERMANY

While war and violence spare no one, they affect everyone differently. Women and girls living in war-torn countries face unimaginable dangers and challenges, as they experience war as victims, fighters or peacemakers.

Aligned with our motto of ‘Awareness, Advocacy and Action’, in 2018, the Soroptimists of Lauterbach-Vogelsberg started the project ‘No more war!’. While many of us are living in peace, there are an untold number of wars and conflicts taking place all over the world, excluding girls and women from developing their strength and abilities. The Soroptimists wanted to raise consciousness that war, and warlike conflicts, only bring sorrow and loss to all, especially to women and girls.

A statue of a lion stands majestically on a central square in the city of Lauterbach (Hessen). Its presence marks Germany’s victory in the Franco-German War (1870-1871). This noble beast, epitomising strength and victory, became the focal point of this project, with his transformation into a visual expression of peace. Since 2018, on International Day of Peace (21 September) the lion has been ‘dressed’ to embody peace. In the first year, he was covered with red, woolen items, knitted by 300 people, from all over Europe. The following year, almost 600 coloured balloons were released from the monument, each with a peace card attached, written and decorated by children, refugees and families. And in 2020 the lion bloomed! He was covered with 168 boxes of flowers, planted by children, senior citizens and church members. With each ‘dressing’, the war monument is transformed into a monument of peace.

In connection with this project, lasting educational values were developed. Peace was discussed in kindergartens, schools, families and churches. Concerts, lectures, cinema programmes and other events accompanied the project, which reached almost 7,000 people.

EduCation

Project achieved by:
• Organising awareness-raising events
• Motivating the target groups with inspirational initiatives

Women & girls reached: 2000
Funds raised by the club: 5000 €
Partners: Demokratie leben!, Kindergartens, schools, senior citizens’ home and more
Increase economic empowerment

_Soroptimists empower women to find employment_

**TOP PROJECT**

**Uniting to making Girls’ Day 2020 count**
Clubs of Nokia, Tammerkoski, Tampere, Vaalakoski - FINLAND

**RUNNERS-UP:**

1. **SI STAR Award**
   Soroptimists from Mainz, Germany (in collaboration with several German clubs)
   The club initiated the SI STAR Award for female film makers to promote more diversity in film. The Award is handed over during the Berlin International Film Festival.

2. **Soroptimists Advocate for Gender Equality (SAGE) in Work**
   Soroptimists from Etiler / Istanbul, Turkey
   The “SAGE in work” project was created to raise awareness and/or reinforce gender equality in working life.

3. **Long-lasting project against poverty in our region**
   Soroptimists from Oudenaarde-Vlaamse Ardennen, Belgium
   The club mobilized in a sustainable project against poverty in the region aggravated because of the Covid19 pandemic.
WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

UNITING TO MAKING GIRLS’ DAY 2020 COUNT

Clubs of Nokia, Tammerkoski, Tampere, Valkeakoski - FINLAND

In February 2020, four Soroptimist Finnish Clubs from Nokia, Tammerkoski, Tampere and Valkeakoski, joined forces. Establishing a working group, they set about developing a programme for ‘Girls’ Day 2020’ (aligned with the United Nations International Day of the Girl Child).

The main objective was to support the activities of the local Girls’ House, which provides girls from 12 to 28 with activities free of charge (such as dialogue groups, personal guidance, sexual guidance and multicultural projects). The clubs did this by organising creative workshops and offering informative presentations aligned with their chosen theme for Girls’ Day of ‘Creativity and its empowering and educational significance for girls’.

Project plans had to be adapted, due to COVID-19 restrictions, and Girls’ Day became ‘Girls’ Day Week’. While the public celebration could not go ahead, and the attendance was restricted to 10 people at a time, that did not stop 43 girls from taking part and benefiting from the workshops on:
- IT and social media
- Well-being
- Dance
- Textile art

Girls were supported beyond the workshops themselves, with five girls receiving financial support and girls facing social exclusion receiving help.

In a show of local support, the General Hospital of Valkeakoski and the Lojer Group Ltd. bought articles designed by girls during two textile art workshops. The girls of today supported those of tomorrow, with the €1,391.81 proceeds from the sales being donated to the Girls’ House to cover summer activities for 180 girls.

Undoubtedly this project has been a real success despite the current context and has even raised the interest of other Soroptimist clubs to replicate it.

PROJECT ACHIEVED BY:

- Implementing empowering workshops
- Supporting girls to regain confidence and to develop interpersonal skills
- Providing financial support to organisations that assist young girls
- Raising awareness of the importance of taking care of oneself

WOMEN & GIRLS REACHED: 223
Funds raised by the clubs: 1391,81 €
Partners:
- Girls’ House Tampere/Settlement
- Tampere Recycling Centre
- Nextiili-paja, Lumene, Tampere
- Vocational College

BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2021
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

3

Eliminate violence against women and girls
Soroptimists fight violence against women and girls

TOP PROJECT

Women’s Safe House – A lot of hard work and a little bit of magic
Club of Costa del Sol - SPAIN

RUNNERS-UP:

1. Report Violence: awareness through a graffiti
   Soroptimists from Friesland-Zuidwesthoek, The Netherlands (in collaboration with SI Friesland-Noord, SI Leeuwarden Noorderlicht and SI Friesland-Zuid, the Netherlands)
   This project aims to raise awareness among the Dutch population by promoting the hotline number that victims or witnesses of violence can call through a graffiti message.

2. Orange Kuwait
   Soroptimists from Kuwait, Kuwait
   The Orange Kuwait Campaign tackled the danger and risks to women and girls due to violence in the household during the 16 days of activism

3. Say no to violence against women
   Soroptimists from Thessaloniki Byzantio, Greece
   In the frame of the Orange the World campaign, the Club informed institutions and citizens about violence against women through various actions.
Domestic violence isolates those experiencing it, something which is worsened for women who are foreign to the country they live in. By assisting women going through domestic violence, the Soroptimists of Costa del Sol ensure they get the help they need, wherever they are from. During the acute phase of the crisis that means arranging for emergency accommodation, food, and a go-bag for survivors and their children. Trained Soroptimists assist foreign women survivors with insufficient Spanish to navigate their way through the Spanish system. They are given support with paperwork, official visits to authorities, medical and psychological assistance, legal representation, financial assistance or aid in finding employment, as well as put in contact with schools, if children are involved.

Collaboration with local authorities and NGOs has been key to providing efficient and effective support. The Spanish Soroptimists created ‘The Magic Book’ to inform the local police about what they do when a critical situation arises. It outlines who is involved in the project, their role, as well as including a list of Soroptimists who can meet with survivors in the acute stage. The ‘Magic Book’ also provides information for survivors themselves in Spanish, English, German, and French, and includes a personal letter.

To further their reach, the Soroptimists are part of VIOGENEX (Gender Violence to Foreigners). This group was founded by a Club member, who, while Head of the Mijas Foreigners’ Department, observed the issues foreign women survivors face if they do not speak the language and do not know the system. The VIOGENEX group works toward improving communication and collaboration among local organisations working with survivors of domestic violence. These include members of the police departments and the Guardia Civil, the Red Cross, La Cala de Mijas Lions Club, Age Care, Soroptimist International Club of Costa del Sol, and departments of the Mijas Council.
Ensure women & girls have access to the highest attainable standard of health care
Soroptimists help provide access to better health and living conditions for women and girls

**RUNNERS-UP:**

1. **A healthy child**
   Soroptimists from Lviv, Ukraine (in collaboration with SI Luxembourg-Doyen – Luxembourg, SI Kreuzlingen – Switzerland, SI Denmark Region 2)
   The Soroptimists opened a vaccination department with a separate entrance in a rural outpatient clinic in order to organize routine immunizations and systematic preventive examinations of children.

2. **Let’s come up against pandemic COVID-19 and its impacts**
   Soroptimists from Xanthia, Greece
   Bring support in solving major social problems caused by Covid19 such as: the burden of physical and mental health, the increase of violence against women, the economic downturn, etc.

3. **“Avró cura di te- I will take care of you”**
   Soroptimists from San Marino, San Marino
   Support the coordination and development of social promotion activities in favour of the elderly, for their well-being, quality of life, and social inclusion.

**TOP PROJECT**
Clean wells mean clean water
Club of Chernihiv - UKRAINE

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**HEALTH & FOOD SECURITY**

4
The empowerment of rural women and girls and the realisation of their human rights are key for the achievement of gender equality and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

The Soroptimists of Chernihiv mobilised to improve the living conditions of isolated women, doing so in collaboration with the Danish clubs of Aarhus, Ringkobing, Søborg, Skanderborg, Grenaa, Brønderslev, Ikast, Skjern-Tarm, Herning and Odense. The authorities of the Kulykovka district of Ukraine contacted the Ukrainian Soroptimists with an official request for help. The situation with wells supplying water to two villages in the area had become critical.

There is no centralised water supply system in this district, therefore the population use excavated wells. In summer water disappears from most of the wells. This is caused by climate changes and a lack of cleaning and maintenance. Many women, who generally bear the task of collecting water for their households, are therefore left without access to quality water.

In these remote areas, women are predominant (the percentage of women is higher than that of men); most live below the poverty line, are elderly and disabled. Wells are vital for daily survival, as they are the only source of water. The Soroptimists took concrete action to improve water supply, they:

- Hired specialists to pump out the wells, analyse the water and clean the wells,
- Raised the attention of local governmental bodies and counted on their direct participation in the project,
- Gained visibility via local and regional TV, radio, newspapers and on social media, to alert more people to this social issue.

Through the Soroptimists’ Clean Wells initiative, 10 wells were cleaned – improving water supply for 85 women and girls. Proud of their achievements and with ambitions to expand the project, the Soroptimists aim to gain greater visibility and mobilise new sponsors.

CLEAN WELLS MEAN CLEAN WATER

Club of Chernihiv - UKRAINE

Every third woman in Ukraine lives in a rural area. Rural women and girls, in addition to facing multiple forms of gender-based discrimination, often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination in connection with their place of residence, age, displacement, or other factors.

HEALTH & FOOD SECURITY

TOP PROJECT

PROJECT ACHIEVED BY:
- Answering the call to improve access to clean water for rural women
- Partnering with relevant entities
- Raising awareness on this issue and alerting the media

WOMEN & GIRLS REACHED: 85

FUNDS RAISED BY THE CLUB: €1,850
FUNDS RAISED BY PARTNERS: €1,050

PARTNER(S): CHERNIHIV CHILDREN’S FUND, KULYKIVKA DISTRICT AUTHORITIES

We are a worldwide network of professionally and socially diverse women.
We are a platform to serve communities, share knowledge and experience.
We educate and empower women and girls to lead.
We fight violence against women and girls.
We give women a voice by lobbying at all levels of society.

www.soroptimisteurope.org