Soroptimist International of Europe
BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2020
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 24 Soroptimist Unions across Europe, the Middle East, Africa & the Caribbean.

How many members and Clubs are there in Europe, the Middle East and Africa?
Currently, 32,943 women are members of the 1,237 Soroptimist Clubs in this region! (Or 1,238 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’ ECOSOC and participatory status at the Council of Europe and the European Women’s Lobby.

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

It will be a 100 years next year that we, Soroptimists, have been working through projects to improve the lives of women and girls. We work together at local, national and international levels to educate, empower and enable.

The brochure you have in your hands presents six awarded projects that vary from local actions to a national scheme implemented together with central government. They show our organisation’s potential and creativity.

These projects represent the total of 5,123 projects worth 7,565,492 € that were implemented from October 1st 2018 to September 30th 2019. To see more of them go to our website where best projects of the month are regularly presented and a map shows them all. If you are a Soroptimist and you can’t find your project there, it is probably because we haven’t received your Project Focus Report (PFR).

The year 2020 has been an extraordinary year, which has lead us to change how the Best Practice Awards will be presented. There will be no handing over of awards on a stage this year, it will be a virtual celebration, but with real applause! We have seen so many things move to a virtual space this year, but let’s not forget our projects are real, and very tangible. I’d like to express sincere thanks to the Programme Team for all their work to have these projects be known and visible - Ingeborg Dietz, Inge Withof, Bintou Koïta.

As I write this note, COVID-19 is still having us stay at home yet I have witnessed all of our Unions and Clubs continue to work tirelessly focusing on issues such as PPE and violence against women was steadily increasing, my hope is that these projects will be submitted for next years’ Best Project Award.

No one knows what is going to happen in the future and how our lives are going to change, but I know one thing for sure: Soroptimist will always be on the forefront, fighting for the best of women and girls.

Always yours,
Anna Wszelaczyńska,
SIE President 2019-2021
Our programme work and its results are our greatest asset!

Many inequalities between women and men are still created by society, upheld by traditions and norms. But you, as Soroptimist, have taken so many valuable efforts to change gender inequalities for the good of all women and girls, including also men and boys, by setting amazing projects, organizing campaigns aiming at ensuring gender equality, justice and democratic values. Thanks to all Unions and Clubs for investing a lot of time to prepare a quality submission. Across the European Federation and beyond, Soroptimists take action, provide creative opportunities and achieve sustainable results. You, our member fellows, « Stand Up for Women » and make a difference!

It’s always a challenging task for the BPA-Jury to choose winners of the Best Practice Awards. And yet it is at the same time a great honour and very gratifying to review the variety of projects. The BPA jury 2020 had evaluated and voted on 98 project applications. We were impressed by the quality of the submissions. Nonetheless, it is our responsibility to select a single winner to highlight particularly commendable efforts for each of the five Programme Focus Objectives of Soroptimist International. After much deliberation, we have chosen the awardees featured in this brochure.

Special remark:
The BPA-jury will be handing out, with the SIE President, Anna Wszelaczyńska, 6 awards aligned with 4 out of 5 Programme Objectives:
- Education — Economic empowerment — Violence against women — Health — except Sustainable Environment due to less than 10 submissions:
  • 4 Club Awards out of 5 of the Programme Objectives
  • 1 Union Award amongst the Programme Objectives
  • 1 special SIE Biennium Award to celebrate the biennium theme 2019-2021: “We Stand Up for Women”. We have also chosen the three runner-ups per awarded Programme Objective.

These awards are testimonials of all your ambitious work. You make your commitment to empowering women and girls worldwide visible through Programme Projects, Advocacy Campaigns and Advocating gender policies. SIE is proud of your performance on this voluntary base. On behalf of the SIE Board and the BPA-Jury we congratulate all winners of Europe Best Practice Awards 2020. You are the ambassadors of SIE efforts to achieve our goals and the real advocates for change!

We encourage you to continue with your excellent work in empowering women and girls in your communities! Continue to strengthen the “Soroptimist spirit” as well as exchanging experiences in solidarity with women all over the world.

2020 Jury

Ingeborg Dietz
SIE Programme Director, Chair of the Jury
Inge Withof
SIE Assistant Programme Director
Vesselinia Tzvetanova
SIE Vice President - Reorganisation/Development Eastern-Europe
Saija Kuusisto – Lancaster
SIE Vice President - Mentoring
Françoise Lathuille
SIE Vice President - E-Membership

SIE Programme Team 2019-2021
Ingeborg Dietz, Programme Director
Inge Withof, Assistant Programme Director
Bintou Koita, SIEHQ Senior Programme Officer
As a club in foundation, the Club of Budapest Corvinus was invited by its Godmother club - Hof-Saale in Germany - to their weekend event dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Similarly to Germany, Hungary played a key role in the opening of the borders in 1989, thus, the Club of Budapest felt inspired to extend the German project to Hungary and add a local pillar. They decided to target the millennial generation to have them not forget what it meant to live in a divided Europe, by using art as the channel for education. Visual arts are borderless in nature and can bridge between generations and nations.

To implement the project, the Hungarian Soroptimists selected an East Hungarian secondary school - focused on arts education - as the benefactor of this project with the objective to give their students international exposure, as well as financial support for the future operations of the institute.

Multiple objectives were successfully obtained: The Soroptimists (in a cross-border cooperation) not only supported a school in need, they also ensured that the new generations remember such an important moment of history.

PROJECT ACHIEVED BY:
- Raising awareness among Millennials on an historical moment
- Promoting arts education
- Organizing exhibitions and raising funds
- Engaging local authorities
- Extending the organization successfully

Concrete actions/timeline:
1. Award-winning film director, Árpád Sopsits, showed and discussed a related movie with young artists in March 2019.
2. The Soroptimists organized a charity dinner the following day in Budapest to raise funds needed to implement the project.
3. A dedicated exhibition with students’ paintings opened on April 5, 2019, in East Hungary. The closing of the exhibition was attended by two acknowledged film directors, as well as the President of Club Hof/Saale. Children made a remarkable performance, aired by local television.
4. The paintings continued their journey through Budapest. On the opening ceremony of the second exhibition, the German, as well as Swiss embassies were represented.
5. The paintings were transported to Hof/Saale for the third exhibition. SI Hof/Saale organized an auction where each painting found its future owner.
6. The revenues of the auction were officially handed over to the art school in December 2019 in Szolnok, Hungary.

SPECIAL SIE BIENNIUM AWARD 2019-2020
The Wall (The 30th Anniversary of the German Wall Fall-Down)
Clubs of Budapest Corvinus (Hungary), Hof/Saale, Plauen/Vogtland (Germany)

The 30th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall inspired the Soroptimists to interpret this historical moment to millennials via the international language of Art.

Women & girls reached: 12000
Funds raised by the clubs: 4000€
Partner(s): SIE Club of Vienna, German & Swiss Embassies in Hungary, 12th District of Budapest, Mayors, Rotary, Zonta and Lions Clubs.
UNION BEST PROJECT

Donne@Lavoro SI SOSTIENE in Carcere: A new dimension of freedom for women in prison through job traineeship

Union of Italy

Italian Soroptimists endeavoured to focus their efforts in promoting gender equality through two main objectives: education and economic empowerment.

Through a collective action of Soroptimist clubs, the Union of Italy initiated a national project in order to improve the future of women in prison granting support through professional training courses and working activities with a “trainer”. At the end of the training women receive a final certificate to be used in the employment market with the help of social cooperatives inside and outside prisons.

The Protocol (Agreement) signed by the Union of Italy in October 2017 and renewed in 2019 with the Ministry of Justice was fundamental to allow the collaboration between the clubs and Prison Administrations. The expectation of this collaboration is to give women an opportunity to achieve economic emancipation inside the prison and give them better perspectives for their return into society through economic independence at the end of imprisonment.

Concretely,
- 50 clubs have joined and organized 60 training courses (hairdresser, ice-cream maker, dressmaker, librarian, aromatic plant grower),
- 30 penitentiary institutions equal to 60 % of all Italian prisons with a female section were involved,
- 30 partners and companies supported and contributed to the project,
- 350 women attended training courses (12% of 2.500 detainees - also mothers with children) obtaining a certificate-diploma. 21 of them now have a job,
- To set up workplaces and rooms, 20 clubs donated the necessary equipment and appliances.
- The Soroptimists have engaged in mentoring to follow the prisoner trainees in order to continuously evaluate the acquired knowledge after 6 months or one year after the course.

Finally, the Soroptimists launched an action at the National Testimonials Conference in the Bollate Prison of Milan called “solidarity gift” which enable them to raise 30.000 € allocated to this national project.

Project achieved by:
- Promoting women’s education
- Providing professional training courses
- Providing mentoring to reach economic independence

Women & girls reached: 350
Funds raised by the Union: 90000 €
Funds raised by partners: 40000 €

Partner(s):
Italian Ministry of Justice, Penitentiary Department and more than 30 partners and companies like IKEA, Fabbri 1905 food company, Musso Gelaterie Italian ice-cream company, etc.
EDUCATION

1. Education for disadvantaged girls - MIA (Mädchen im Aufwind)
   Soroptimists from Düsseldorf-Oberkassel, Germany
   Supported ten girls in their last two years of school through personal coaching and organization of workshops to strengthen their self-confidence.

2. Enhancing the teaching and learning environment of children who require Special Needs Education (SNE) at Pandiери Primary School located in Nylambo Slums, Kisumu County
   Soroptimists from Kisumu, Kenya in collaboration with SI Bad Ragaz (Switzerland) and the Roswitha Ott Fund
   Pre-vocational training to discover and nurture talent development in children with special needs and equip them with skills and knowledge to be independent.

3. SAGE: Soroptimists Advocate Gender Equality
   Soroptimists from Etiler / Istanbul, Turkey
   SAGE in Work (SAGEW) is a project that aims to raise awareness about gender equality in working life. It was implemented in Istanbul by European Union grants.
Girls Day 2019 event at the Finnish Science Centre Heureka

Club of Helsinki-Meri, in collaboration with SI Espoo, SI Espoo-Meri, SI Helsinki, SI Helsinki III Helsingfors, SI Helsinki-Erottaja, SI Kauniainen-Grankulla, SI Vantaa (Finland)

It’s a new era for women. Nowadays, girls grow up hearing they can do anything, be anything. And yet, there is still not enough women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) to create equality. To help close the gender gap (STEM) Soroptimists in Finland took action to inspire girls!

SI Helsinki-Meri in partnership with 7 Soroptimists clubs in Finland arranged a “Girls Day programme at the Finnish Science Centre Heureka” targeted to girls of secondary schools. They invited 800 students and their teachers to participate in the 3,5 hours programme. The goal of the project was to arrange a hands-on workshop with STEM role models, to promote girls’ interest in science and technology.

The one-day programme was highly interactive thanks to the participation of companies and organisations who shared their expertise and knowledge with the audience.

The Soroptimists procured some sponsors and volunteers to set up several stands to familiarize in different STEM fields. The project was a great success among young girls and the Soroptimists in Finland have agreed to arrange this kind of event again in 2021.

With more women in STEM careers, it will become more evident to young girls what they can offer the world. According to Nichelle Nichols, an actress and NASA diversity and recruitment collaborator, who says “Science is not a boy’s game. Science is not a girl’s game. It’s everyone’s game”.

- Project achieved by:
- Organising different awareness-raising events
- Motivating the target groups with inspirational leaders

Women & girls reached: 800
Funds raised by the clubs: 15 043 €
Partners: Finnish Science Center Heureka

Workshops:
1. Sustainable circular economy - Metsä Group
2. Xylitol workshop - Fazer
3. Math Adventures - Aalto University
4. Crime scene investigation - The Forensic Laboratory of the National Bureau of Investigation
5. Robotics football - Heureka
6. Perfume chemistry - Heureka
7. Sustainable development and online shopping – Stay responsible

Increase economic empowerment

*SOROPTIMISTS empower women to find employment*

**TOP PROJECT**
Meeting the needs of various vocational workshops for women in prison
Club of Ankara, Turkey

**RUNNERS-UP:**

1. **Femmes et Dignité: Entrepreunariat Social - Atelier de Serviettes Hygiéniques**
   Soroptimists from Genève Rhône, Switzerland
   Financing of a sewing workshop to produce cotton sanitary towels. This workshop was intended to give a professional activity to women in exile or victims of violence in the DRC.

2. **Active Soroptimist/Active Summer**
   Soroptimists from Ringerike, Norway
   Recreational activities for women and children in a transit centre for refugees and asylum seekers, in collaboration with other voluntary organizations.

3. **The society that women are planning**
   Soroptimists from San Marino, San Marino
   The project was designed to encourage the analysis, knowledge, and enhancement of the contribution of the women of San Marino to the economy of the country.
Education, work and vocational training in prisons are fundamental to the wellbeing, rehabilitation and social reintegration. Investing in women in prison should enable them to become productive and law-abiding members of society after release by providing them with basic life skills, improving their education, and increasing their employment opportunities. Steady employment following release is one of the most important factors that prevent recidivism, together with strong family ties and support.

This established fact pushed the Soroptimists of Ankara to be active and support these women. In order to start the project, they sent a permission letter to the General Directorate of Adult Recovery Unit to explain their goal. Under the leadership of both Presidents (past and current), with the financial help of members and donors, they provided supplies of handicraft, painting, knitting and doll making courses. Concretely, the traditional hand-embroidery course is taught 16 hours per week for a total of 361 hours, and the doll-making course using knitting needles and crochet is taught for 30 hours per week for a total of 320 hours.

Considering the cost of supply and inability of these women to purchase the materials, it is important to underline that the assistance of the Soroptimists in providing the necessary equipment had a significant impact on the effectiveness of these courses. Women who attended these workshops enhanced their confidence and they have the courage to face the community with acquired life skills. The hope is that what the learned during the workshops will help them survive as a self-sufficient individual in free society and to prevent them from returning back to prisons. The project is still ongoing.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF VARIOUS VOCATIONAL WORKSHOPS FOR WOMEN IN PRISON
Club of Ankara, Turkey
The main objective of this project is to empower women to spend their time effectively, with vocational training whilst detained in the Women’s Prison and Detention House in Sincan (Turkey). The project also consists in preparing women for integration in the community as they get out of prison for self-reliance and employment.

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PROJECT ACHIEVED BY:
• IMPLEMENTING VOCATIONAL TRAINING
• SUPPORTING WOMEN TO REGAIN CONFIDENCE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE
• PREPARING WOMEN FOR RE-INTEGRATION

WOMEN & GIRLS REACHED: 400
Funds raised by the club: 2620 €
Eliminate violence against women and girls

Soroptimists fight violence against women and girls

TOP PROJECT

Connected bracelets for “ELLES”
Club of Agen, France

RUNNERS-UP:

1. Evolving beyond trauma
Soroptimists from Vienna Clubs, Austria
The goal is to allow women and girls who have been abused to talk about it and to show possible ways out of the threat and trauma within a discussion.

2. Go Tell About Orange the World
Soroptimists from Wroclaw, Poland
During the Orange campaign, the club used various tools and media to raise awareness on violence against women to give strength to women and demystify the taboo theme of domestic violence.

3. Orange the World campaign- “Do you know or are you 1 of 3...?”
Soroptimists from Bussum, Netherlands
Creation of a strong local basis for the 16 days campaign by actively seeking cooperation in the region to increase support and activating over a hundred members to engage their network.
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

CONNECTED BRACELETS FOR “ELLES”
Club of Agen, France

According to the UN, the location “the most dangerous for women” is home, it is a place of violence that requires a quick and discreet response*. In France, a woman dies every three days at the hands of her companion. Therefore, it was obvious for the Soroptimists to act, and the members of the Club of Agen mobilized.

The members have heard of the free application called App-Elles and the possibility of using connected bracelets via this application which allow alerting in the event of danger. By activating the bracelet, a woman who is subjected to violence turns on the mobile’s microphone and GPS via the App-Elles application. The three trusted people (friends, family) designated by the wearer of the bracelet will hear in real time what is happening and will know where it is happening. The sounds can be listened to for fifteen days (usable with the authorities and the justice) and it works abroad. Soroptimists worked with the Delegate for Women’s Rights and Equality; they provided them with a subvention of 4000 euros and took charge of handing over the 241 connected bracelets to associations and shelters for women victims of violence.

To carry out this action, the Club of Agen organized a Christmas party to collect funds to finance the purchase of connected bracelets: meals, concerts, raffles and pastry sales. Then in partnership with the Delegate for Women’s Rights, the Soroptimists met and sensitized 500 students with education and prevention sessions on violence against women.

With this action, the Soroptimists targeted a large audience with the ambition that other Soroptimist clubs could assimilate this action in order to ensure the protection, information, and necessary assistance to “save lives”. The project received wide media coverage at a regional level.

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. Pilot Village - Health Activities
   Soroptimists from Adana, Turkey
   A series of activities supporting women and children became possible via a “Pilot Village” project, specifically addressing some health issues in the outskirts of Adana.

2. Dental project: training to improve dental health among refugees
   Soroptimists from Västerås, Sweden
   A dental training was arranged for refugee women with children, newly arrived in Sweden.

3. Holidays for families with critically ill children
   Soroptimists from Oudenaarde-Vlaamse Ardennen, Belgium
   Support mothers in an extremely difficult situation: permanent care 24/7 for seriously ill children in combination with work and family life. (In collaboration with the Soroptimist Clubs Zottegem, Aalst, Gent, Land van Waas and Gent Scaldis in Belgium)
HEALTH & FOOD SECURITY

TAP - THALASSEMIA AWARENESS PROJECT 2019

Club of Kuwait, Kuwait

The Soroptimists in Kuwait spread awareness about blood-related diseases, especially Thalassemia, because the numbers of patients in the Arab Gulf region is the highest in the world. The government has an effective service process especially pre-marriage testing for inherited diseases; however, the region doesn’t have specialized centre for Thalassemia treatment.

TAP 2019 was a first partnership with another regional NGO called Loyac, to raise awareness about the above objectives. Loyac reached out to develop a yearly summer course about the hereditary diseases, especially Thalassemia. SI Kuwait developed a curriculum to educate, enable, and empower youth to spread awareness about the disease and encourage them to join the advocacy movement.

The course consisted of different age groups of youth who were registered in Loyac summer camp of 2019. The Soroptimists prepared a 7-day curriculum for the students which included guest speakers, field trips, blood drives, and a day in one of Kuwait’s biggest shopping centres to mentor youth on how to raise awareness through creative communication skills and acquired knowledge.

Due to this joint awareness and advocacy action, SI Kuwait was able to change one of the governmental policies regarding blood pumps. In the past it was distributed for free only for citizens. Now it is for all nationalities that suffer from the disease who live in Kuwait. This is a milestone achievement to SI Kuwait.

PROJECT ACHIEVED BY:
- Raising awareness via various activities
- Organizing a summer camp
- Partnering with an NGO with expert knowledge

WOMEN & GIRLS REACHED: 600
PARTNER(S):
LOYAC: YOUTH NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

With Thalassemia Awareness Project 2019 (TAP), SI Kuwait is aiming to:

1. ADVOCATE AND RAISE FUNDS TO OPEN A THALASSEMA CENTRE TO HELP PATIENTS RECEIVE THEIR REGULAR BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS AND MANAGE THEIR CHRONIC IRON OVERLOAD.
2. PROMOTE BLOOD DRIVES.
3. RAISE AWARENESS FOR ORGAN AND BONE MARROW DONATIONS.
4. SET UP A WEBSITE TO RECEIVE DONATIONS FOR THE THALASSEMIA AWARENESS PROGRAMME.
5. CREATE SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES OF THALASSEMIA PATIENTS TO WORK TOGETHER WITH OTHER HEALTH-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS IN KUWAIT.
6. ENCOURAGE THE YOUTH TO HAVE GENETIC BLOOD-TESTING TO AVOID HEREDITARY ILLNESSES FROM RAPIDLY INCREASING.
7. DONATE BLOOD PUMPS TO INDIVIDUALS IN NEED.
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.

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