



Subject: EU Commission Justice and Fundamental Rights Initiative on Combating Gender-based violence, protecting victims and punishing offenders

14th May 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

Soroptimist International of Europe welcomes the EU Commission strategy for a proposal of a Directive on **preventing and combatting gender-based violence and domestic violence**, expressed in the Gender Equality Strategy (2020-25) and planned for the fourth quarter of 2021.

We emphasize the value of this consultation process and the meaning of the possibility that any citizen, in this case any Soroptimist Union or Member, can express their views, share concerns and contribute with responses, to the correct assessment of needs, towards a common goal of eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

Along with the ongoing “fitness check” to assess current EU legislation and to analyse whether EU measures are sufficient and consistent with International Law, this is undoubtedly a bold purpose.

§ How can we help the EU Commission?

We participate actively in decision-making at all levels of society thanks to a network of 31.500 members in 44 European countries, with our headquarters being in Geneva, Switzerland.

As part of a global non-governmental organisation completing 100 years in 2021, with more than 72.000 members, we inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through our international partnerships.

Soroptimist International of Europe is proud to hold consultative status at the United Nations’ ECOSOC, participatory status at the Council of Europe and active membership with the European Women’s Lobby, and to contribute to the work of the OSCE. Soroptimists also regularly participate in various NGO forums of concern to women at national and international levels.

§ Our Mission and Values:

Soroptimists in Europe work under the motto ***We Stand Up for Women***, to ensure that women and girls will achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

Soroptimists transform the lives and the status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities.



The principles of Soroptimist are to strive for:

- The advancement of the status of women;
- High ethical standards;
- Human rights for all;
- Equality, development and peace;
- Promoting international understanding, goodwill and peace.

Being non-party political, non-religious and non-sectarian, Soroptimist International encourages all members to be aware of and to be involved in all issues of society that relate to women's human rights.

Eliminating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence is on the heart of our projects and of our advocacy actions.

Violence Against Women is the most widespread pandemic of all times. It is systemic, based on unequal power relations between women and men and it mainly originates from patriarchal culture.

We all have information on how deep it affects all sectors of women's and girls' lives. Its human long-term suffering makes it utterly unacceptable. Also, the economic damage and the costs for all societies are extremely high. VAWG significantly affects sustainable development.

Soroptimists can offer the EU Commission the learnings and expertise built by their members because they have a know-how based on years of work to address the specific problems and needs of victims of violence. By reporting on their observations and their monitoring of projects conducted in the communities, we want to assist in achieving a solution for this pandemic.

§ The proposed steps:

For the purposes of this Consultation, we hereby list some key factors that should be incorporated or accompanied by, as following:

1. We call for the EU final accession to the **Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention**. Gender equality and non-discrimination are core values of the European Union in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and in line with it, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights reaffirms such values, protecting the right to dignity and physical as well as mental integrity. However, it remains missing an EU specific binding instrument designed to protect victims from violence against women. It is not enough that EU Member States as such have signed the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, a powerful, comprehensive international tool to tackle violence against women through various measures. Because some states did not ratify it, some fail to accomplish it and recently, sudden withdrawal by Turkey (though a non-EU Member State) can negatively influence other EU Member States. It ultimately showed how fragile women in Europe remain.



- 1.1 Embodying this final accession as a priority will allow the EU to ensure further compliance of this vital instrument across all EU countries without exception.
- 1.2 An EU Directive is fundamental as a binding and comprehensive legal instrument to firmly disrupt the continuum of violence against women, and it should be thought as a holistic EU legislation ensuring that all women in Europe are equally and fully protected from all forms of violence wherever they live;
2. The European Union should **recognise the fact that violence affects disproportionately women**, and that it is based on the unequal power relations between women and men, on male oppression exerted over women.
3. The planned **EU Directive should include all forms of violence** against women and girls interpreted as per the International Instruments, Treaties and Conventions.
4. The European Union should also take special attention to the high number of children victims of physical and emotional violence and in addition, if they are witnesses in contexts of domestic violence. Violence will severely affect not only their well-being but also their future.
5. Compliance with provisions of the ILO Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work and the CEDAW general recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), UN 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the 1979 CEDAW Convention, Article 6, is fundamental;
6. The EU Directive should include definitions of different forms of violence against women and girls. Following lockdown measures after the pandemic of COVID-19, definitions should also encompass emerging types of violence;
7. Appointment of an **EU Commission Coordinator** to monitor compliance with legal obligations. This appointment will surely be a positive step forward for the elimination of VAWG.
8. Considering violence against women as a specific **euro-crime**;
9. Ensuring transnational means of collaboration and **gender budget** enough to support needed educational measures for the prevention of violence.

We finish saying that this is a significant and bold step forward, congratulating the EU Commission for the consultation on preventing and combatting gender-based violence against women and domestic violence.

From our side, we will continue to mobilize actions and projects towards women's and men's equality and towards "zero violence" sustainable societies.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Wszelaczyńska
SIE President 2019-2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Wszelaczyńska'.