

THE LINK

A global voice for women



“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”
Nelson Mandela

Invest in
EDUCATION

Helping the
MIGRANTS

16 days of activism
Violence against women

Speaking up on
CLIMATE CHANGE

Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions, working through service projects to build a better world for women. There are currently some 80,000 members in more than 3,000 clubs in 132 countries. Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is one of four SI Federations. It has some 34,000 members in 62 countries. Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. For more information about the aims, activities and projects that characterise our organisation, please visit our SIE website at www.soroptimisteurope.org.

Soroptimist  International of Europe

Information on The 'new' Link

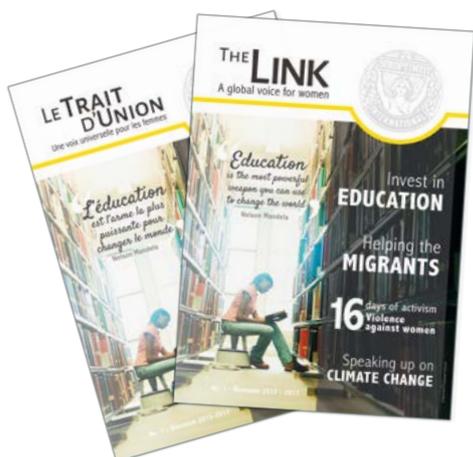
Dear Soroptimists

After seven years as Editor of **The Link**, Christine Cromwell-Ahrens now wishes to step down from this role. We would like to congratulate and thank her sincerely for all the publications she has put together so superbly over these past years. They have provided a showcase for the tremendous work undertaken by the Soroptimist Unions and Clubs.

For the 2015-2016 year, the SIE board members have decided to continue publishing four quarterly magazines. But since all change should engender an element of innovation, their concept will differ slightly. The magazine will focus on each quarter's big UN international days that relate to our biennial theme, **'Invest in Education'**, with articles that demonstrate how our Union and Club activities and projects support the programme's objectives. It will also address recent topical issues, report on projects being undertaken by our newer clubs, as well as the agenda.

We invite you to send your articles and photos on any of your projects and activities, as well as any announcements, including contact details of the person in charge of communication.

We will endeavour to publish the next three issues as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, thank you all for bearing with us and we look forward to working together in the publishing year ahead.



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Message from the President

Dear Soroptimist Friends

It is with mixed feelings that I write to you today. Although I welcome this first issue of **The “new” Link** with great pleasure, I realise that it marks the end of the magazine we all know so well, as it now reflects a thorough reorganisation of our communications and branding.



A job well done

Our Board remains committed to delivering magazines to our subscribers this year and we applaud the innovative changes that our Communications team and our HQ have made to build on and enhance our magazine, so professionally edited by Christine Cromwell for the last eight years. On behalf of all our members – and of five SIE Presidents – I would like to congratulate Christine for a job well done!

Focus on themes

In addition to a new look, **The Link** now features thematic issues that present diverse opinions – both of Soroptimists and others – designed to open up a ‘virtual’ discussion and stimulate readers with plenty of food for thought. We hope this will serve as a benchmark for future issues.

New ways to invest in education

A large share of this issue is dedicated to our Biennium theme, **“Invest in Education”**, one that is sure to inspire Soroptimists of the countless ways they can bring practical help to women and girls in our communities and beyond. Although our organisation has always devoted most of its energy, creativity and funds to education, today’s troubled times challenge us to find new ways to invest our time, dedication and advocacy. Whether you decide to adopt a school by setting up a library or supporting computer courses and vocational training, or you volunteer to mentor young adults or grant scholarships in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) areas, or perhaps you prefer to adopt a shelter for victims of violence, or assist the thousands of women migrants, I see no better ways for you to interpret our biennium theme.

Proud to be Soroptimists

Finally, to make your actions even more noteworthy, please don’t forget to wear your pin and show our Soroptimist emblem with pride!

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis

President, Soroptimist International Europe

March 2016

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“We must make quality education available to all children, young people and adults. Together, we can empower individuals to transform our world.”

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General.



Educate. *Educate.* Educate.

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, SIE President

Education is the most important driving force for human development. It opens doors to the employment market, it's a tool to achieve gender equality, it reduces child mortality, and it helps fight gender-based violence - a critical social problem of pandemic proportions.

At the youngest age, education equips boys and girls with the common base of knowledge they need to navigate through life. Later on, it empowers people with the skills and values they need to evolve together in society and to shape a better world. Through life-long learning initiatives, education can also offer many a 'second chance'. For instance, to those who dropped out of school or never even attended in the first place.

Almost all countries have committed to making the dream of achieving universal equal education come true. As UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, said: *"We must make quality education available to all children, young people and adults. Together, we can empower individuals to transform our world."*

Huge gaps in access to quality of education

In their own countries, Soroptimists see a big gap between policy ambitions and reality. In many places, children still face barriers to access education, having to walk kilometres to the nearest school or being unable to afford to attend. And, while access to primary education overall seems to be levelling out around the world, when it comes to quality of education and time spent in school, a massive gap still remains. The education level of the adult workforce, which is measured by the average number of years of school, in developed countries is double that of developing countries.¹

Developed countries are not immune

Developed countries also face some challenges, especially when we take into account differences in public and private systems and racial and class gaps in educational attainment for several developed countries. Dropout rates are a big issue in the US, for instance, where about 25 per cent of high school

freshmen (first year students) fail to graduate high school on time. In the UK, about 10 per cent of school leavers did not enter college or employment. If Europe lacks statistics on the problem, Soroptimists in many Unions and Clubs are witnessing an increase in young people dropping out of schools. The biennium theme is certainly coming at the perfect time!

Boys still get priority for education

While many governments have pledged to implement conventions – like The International Convention on the Rights of the Child – and have been developing education initiatives, there are major discrepancies between countries. Although in theory all children have the right to go to school, many can not. And, it is well known that if a family can send only one child to school, it is often the boy who gets priority while the girl stays at home, helping her mother with domestic tasks or working in the fields.

Helping women and girls, day after day

The 1,256 Soroptimists Clubs of the European Federation's 62 countries have all developed educational projects at some time. PFRs show that many Clubs have raised funds and worked together in practical ways to provide safe learning environments, by collecting textbooks, offering support for parents, providing transportation to school and teacher training.

Proudly, if perhaps a little too discretely sometimes, Soroptimist Clubs across the Federation help women and girls, day after day.

¹ - <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-32397212>

Education

Key to change and the eradication of poverty

Report extract by Evelyne Para
Soroptimist International Representative at UNESCO, President Elect, SI Union of France



Literacy, training, the sharing of knowledge and good practices needed to run a successful, income-generating business, the development of critical thinking and the capacity for sound personal judgement to give women the confidence to act and speak up rather than withdrawing and becoming submissive - these are key factors in combatting poverty.

Equal opportunities key to eliminating poverty

The provision of more widespread education for young girls and training for women is an essential factor in the drive to enable millions of people to exit the vicious circle of poverty and hunger. If women were offered, on the same level playing field as men, economic and educational opportunities together with the freedom necessary to capitalise on them, a major hurdle to eliminating world poverty would be overcome.

Increasing investment in education for young girls

This is why Soroptimist International, NGOs and the international community believe that education is fundamental to women's emancipation and the elimination of poverty. Together they are investing more and more in the education of young girls, even if a great deal remains to be done. In 2010, the World Bank estimated that girls still made up more than half of the 67 million children worldwide who did not go to school, and that two thirds of the 796 million illiterate adults were women.

UNESCO global partnership supports education for girls and women

The global partnership committed to the education of girls and women, launched by UNESCO in 2011, has given rise to numerous projects in the developing world. They are guided by the belief that educating girls and women can break the

poverty cycle, contribute towards gender equality and foster greater social justice and economic development as well as a sustainable peace.

UNESCO forum values informal apprenticeships

At the June 2015 UNESCO Forum : 'The Role of Women in Fighting Poverty', numerous NGO representatives discussed the value of informal apprenticeship programmes for adolescents and women throughout their lives – apprenticeships which must never exclude the most vulnerable members of society (for example, those with disabilities or victims of sexual violence). We stressed both the need to do away with taboos, for example to enable girls and women to access scientific careers, and to highlight the important role that fathers play in education.

Reaching out to the most vulnerable and marginalised

During this forum, associations talked about what they were doing to help combat poverty. Beyond the established practice of distributing food and clothing parcels, volunteers working for these associations in partnership with community workers in towns and cities, now deploy training and re-insertion programmes for vulnerable or marginalised women.



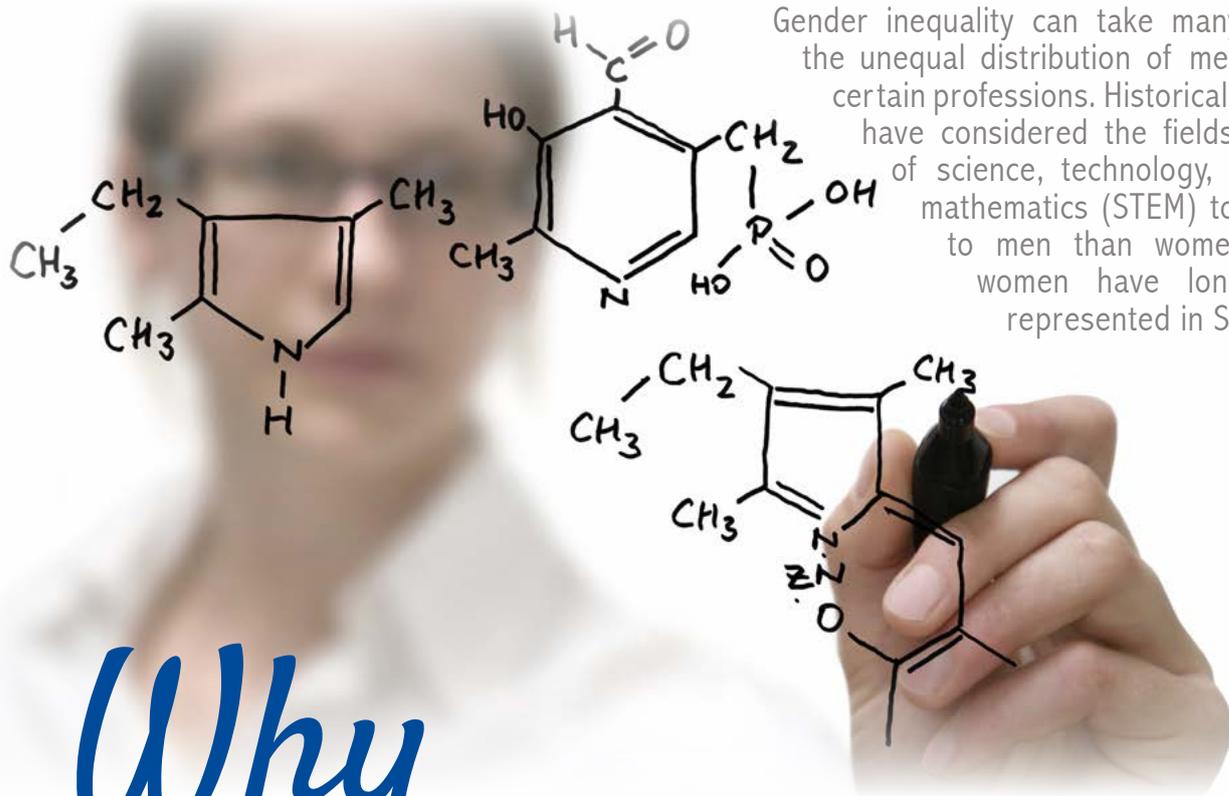
“In order to be an effective force for change, the development programme for 2015 onwards must establish priorities in terms of gender equality and women’s independence. The world will never be able to fully achieve its goals if more than half of its inhabitants are not in the position to realise their potential and take control of their lives”,

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General.

Conclusion and recommendations of the UNESCO Forum, June 2015

The following priorities were defined:

- 1 Ensure complete **equality** between men and women in order for women to play their full part in the drawing up, governance and implementation of public policies across the board at a local, national and international level.
- 2 Roll out education programmes for girls and life-long training for women so that **women can gain their independence** and raise their status.
- 3 Launch a worldwide appeal for all countries to undertake legislative and administrative reforms so that women have **complete and equal access to production resources** (and water is cited at the top of the list), including inheritance rights and access to land ownership rights.
- 4 Redefine policies to **eliminate poverty** so that they specifically respond to women’s needs, particularly in rural areas.
- 5 Guarantee a **minimum revenue** for poor families who are often headed up by women and help them to access education, housing, health services and so forth.
- 6 Defend the **rights of women** living in extreme poverty and ensure their voices are heard and their dignity respected.
- 7 Introduce a **wider definition of poverty**, which goes beyond basic living needs to encompass moral and social demands in line with the respect for human rights.



Gender inequality can take many forms. One is the unequal distribution of men and women in certain professions. Historically, many societies have considered the fields and disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to be more suited to men than women. As a result, women have long been under-represented in STEM fields.

Why are there so few women in STEM ?

Anne Simon, SIE Executive Director

If you Google search 'great scientists' today, you'll find names like Einstein, Newton, Galileo, Darwin, Pasteur, Tesla, Edison, Hawking, Bohr, Nobel, Hubble and Watson. With the exception of Marie Curie, all the 'great scientists' mentioned in our history textbooks are men. There were less female scientists in general and so less 'great' ones that history remembers. However, gender inequality also shapes whose history is told and retold. Marie Curie's story made it through, but other great women in STEM have been forgotten, especially by popular culture.

Preference for biological and medical sciences

Though trends in higher education vary across countries, women tend generally to concentrate on the humanities and social sciences. Within STEM there are also gender disparities, with more women earning degrees in biological sciences compared to engineering, computer sciences and physics. This trend is similar in the workforce. Though women make up roughly half the workforce in developed countries, North America and Western Europe only has around 30 per cent employed in STEM.¹ Of those, about 50 per cent work in the biological and medical sciences, with just 20 per cent in computer and mathematical sciences, and in 13 per cent in engineering.²

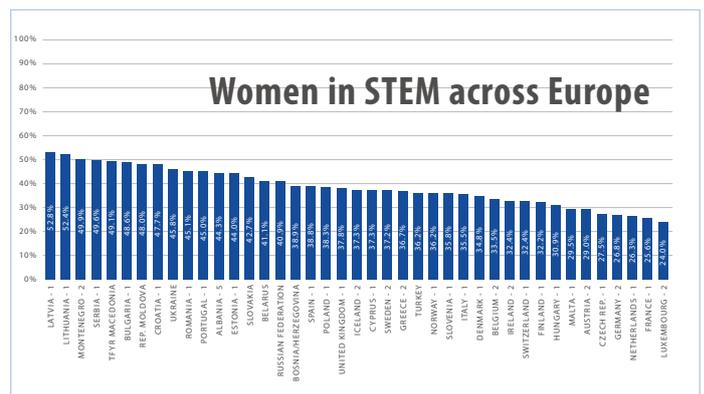
Why the gender gap?

Recently, governments, academic societies and development institutions have begun to research the cause of the gender

gap in STEM. They report several obstacles such as the 'leaky pipeline' – an image used to explain how women tend to drop out of STEM fields at various stages of their careers. Other factors include 'hierarchical segregation' which means that the number of women decreases as they move up the ladder of power and prestige.

Discrimination at fault?

It's not quite clear what causes this type of hierarchical barrier, but discrimination by males in top levels of the field is a likely possibility, as well as the fact that women in high positions seem to mentor less than men. There is also evidence of discrimination in hiring processes and attitudes towards



women in science that affect women's own willingness to enter jobs in male-dominated fields or that end up causing women to leave.³ It is unclear to what extent work-life balance considerations come into play as well, but considering a lack of gender parity across all fields of employment which places child-caring responsibilities mostly on women, and also considering employers' and the labour markets' general lack of flexibility to accommodate such responsibilities, it is likely that this is also a factor.

Importance of early encouragement

Finally, there are other issues that come into play much earlier, such as a lack of encouragement, role models and importance given to girls' engagement in STEM subjects at primary, middle, and high school levels. Occupational segregation –



or people's tendency to cluster in jobs that are associated with a particular gender, like women being predominant in care work and men in STEM fields – begins at an early age, with teenage girls opting out or dropping out of STEM classes.

There are many ideas circulating about how to facilitate women's representation in STEM, whether through better hiring practices, creating visible role models and addressing discrimination in the field. It is also important to prevent early discouragement and build girls' confidence in their scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical abilities.

1 - UNESCO Institute for Statistics, October 2015

2 - http://ngcpjproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/ngcpstemstats_web.pdf

3 - Wikipedia. « Women in STEM fields » Accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_STEM_fields

Fast forward with education

Maria Luisa Frosio, SIE Scholarship Committee Chair, seeks your support for a new campaign, 'Invest in a Scholarship', created to encourage and support more women's careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

There are still far too few women in top-level positions and a widespread gender salary gap. The continued under-representation of women in many fields, particularly at the highest levels, underlies many of the scholarships offered to women by institutions and organisations around the world.

Since the Scholarship Fund was established in 1968, Soroptimist International of Europe continues to empower women and girls through education by awarding scholarships to women in the professions or business who want to undertake further training or are going through a career change. Women who have started professional and/or vocational training, and live in a developing country with an existing SIE Club, can also apply for funding to improve their education, skills and employment prospects.

Focus on encouraging STEM education

There just aren't enough women pursuing a professional life in science and we need to encourage them to do so by making funding available. So, this year, SIE will give particular consideration to candidates who intend to pursue careers in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) areas.

The SIE 'Invest in a Scholarship' campaign, launched last December, will give women or girls the opportunity to realise their dreams and potential in the STEM area. Strengthening

girls' and young women's involvement in such areas can be a powerful accelerator of gender equality, empowerment of women and economic development. Investing in women's education will also make a crucial contribution not only to economic development, but also to progress the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The total amount available for SIE scholarships each year is about €105,000. Last year, SIE attributed 17 grants to candidates sponsored by clubs in 14 countries for a total of €108,406. Unions and clubs are also doing a great job providing scholarships, grants and prizes together with leadership, sponsorship and mentoring programmes with substantial money invested. It is important to show the impact of all this work done by our 35,000 members, so SIE will launch a survey shortly to gather information.

Help us raise more funds for education

We **need** to increase our efforts and our commitment to raise more money for scholarships. We **need** to keep investing in education. It is crucial to mobilise more resources because **a world in which women reach their full intellectual, social and political potential is a more secure, healthier and prosperous world for all.**

Education *projects* by SIE Unions and Clubs

SI SLATINA (ROMANIA) Partnership in Education for Romanian and Roma children



SI Slatina (Romania) supported the schooling of 15 Roma children to prevent them from dropping out. The club engaged the municipal government of Priatra Sat to help them identify Roma children in need. Club members met with

the children's parents and teachers and started fundraising to support families in purchasing school supplies, clothes and gifts to reward them for their academic achievements. The club also awarded scholarships to older students from disadvantaged backgrounds and who were taking 8th grade examinations. The scholarship money paid for mathematics tutoring courses to help students pass the exam needed to move up to 9th grade. The project and the club continue to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in school and improve their performance in their studies.

SI AGADIR (MOROCCO) Supplies for a school canteen



SI Agadir (Morocco) encouraged higher school attendance in rural areas by helping to supply a canteen. Children often abandon school because they lack resources or because malnourishment makes learning

difficult. The club built and supplied a canteen in 2006 in a rural area of the Taroudant province. The canteen opened in 2007, catering for 80 students from surrounding villages. The canteen is essential since most children have to walk 2km to school and stay there the entire day because they can't return home for lunch. SI Agadir has been taking care to re-supply the canteen and also distributes school supplies and clothes for children in the Trin Tigouga region.

School attendance has improved significantly since the construction of the canteen and absenteeism has gone down.



Soroptimists Invest in Education

ONE THEME 'EDUCATION' & THREE AREAS OF FOCUS	Eradication of gender based illiteracy	Educate women and girls to be leaders in their communities and professions	Education as a means and tool to defeat violence against women
	<p>Education The concept of literacy goes well beyond simply knowing how to read</p> <p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables women to pursue knowledge • Enables women to be independent • Teaches women their rights • Helps women to cope with change in their societies • Is showing women the benefits of education for their children • Enables women to think critically 	<p>Women empowerment Empowered women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfil their potential to become leaders • Access tertiary quality education and professional training • Access economic power and obtain gender equality in professions • Attain sustainable employment opportunities • Can develop in sciences and technology professions (STEM) • Access vocational training to reach out to employment • Get out of gendered division / stereotypes • Can be enrolled in non-discriminatory (migration, ethnic minorities, disabled, etc.) education and training 	<p>Violence against Women</p> <p>Education can help combat violence against women</p> <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raises awareness • Prevents trafficking • Helps rebuild victims' confidence • Teaches women to speak up • Teaches women to take their space in conflict resolution • Teaches women to refuse FGM and child marriage for their daughters • Teaches women to fight stereotypes that generate violence

SI BRUXELLES SABLON (BELGIUM) Expansion of a nursing and midwifery school

SI Bruxelles Sablon (Belgium) financially supported the extension of a nursing and midwifery school in Rwanda. The school, at its previous capacity, wasn't training enough nurses/midwives to be able to respond effectively to the needs of the area. Rwandan nurses met with club members in Belgium and informed them about local difficulties in accessing health services. Thanks to the expansion of the school, one hundred nurses were trained.

SI WIESBADEN (GERMANY) "The future is in my hands"

SI Wiesbaden with the SI Loe-Club Wiesbaden (Germany) conducted workshops, at the Louise-Schroeder-School in Wiesbaden, for girls aged 15-17 who come from migrant families or backgrounds that put them at an educational disadvantage. The School gives girls who didn't finish their education another chance to pass the high school examination. The workshops complement academic tutorials and are meant to encourage girls to stay on track with their education by addressing their learning challenges, improving their self-esteem and motivating them to finish school. A professional psychologist and pedagogue, who specialises in working with underprivileged girls, lead the workshops.

Educational support for refugees

Union of Germany

Building a school for Syrian refugees in Turkey

SI Isartal / Bad Tölz (Germany)

Helping unaccompanied minor refugees

Germany has received many refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, including many unaccompanied children. The clubs give German language courses to unaccompanied refugee minors to aide their integration in Germany.

Preparation courses and vocational courses for young refugees in Germany

The SI Wurgrau-Frankische Schwiezclub offered language and vocational courses in craftsmanship, commerce and business for young refugees.

Language classes to refugee children in primary schools.

SI Giessen

See more education projects on page 26.

Biennium action list 2015 - 2017

WHAT CAN SOROPTIMISTS DO? HOW CAN THEY INVEST?	Eradication of gender based illiteracy	Educate women and girls to be leaders in their communities and professions	Education as a means and tool to defeat violence against women
	<p>'Adopt' a school</p> <p>To improve the quality of education, help improve access to secondary and tertiary education and support lifelong training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build schools or classrooms • Rehabilitate schools/furniture • Set up a library for a school • Improve the supply and quality of textbooks • Provide girls' scholarships for secondary schools • Mentor young adults • Support computer courses • Provide vocational training • Train teachers 	<p>'Adopt' a women's community centre</p> <p>Through education, improve access to economic empowerment and sustainable opportunities for the employment of women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clubs to open their network for the professional reintegration of women • Help girls who dropped out of school • Mentoring: Share/exchange skills and knowledge and offer professional guidance • Provide scholarships for women to pursue professional development to advance their careers <p>'Adopt' a migration centre</p> <p>Through education, help immigrant women to integrate rapidly into the host country's society and economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach women the host country's language • Help women understand their 'new' rights and obligations • Teach women the local habits and customs • Guide women through the employment maze • Give women scholarships and vocational training 	<p>'Adopt' a shelter</p> <p>Offer shelter heads your competences in specific fields</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a library • Help women understand their rights • Help women to reconstruct their lives and regain confidence • Assist women to get back to work • Provide legal counselling for women who have been victims of violence



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The Soroptimist response to the refugee crisis :

Think global - *Act local*

Forced migration is certainly not a new phenomenon. Throughout history people have fled their home countries as a consequence of war, geopolitics, persecution or economic crises. However, the massive exodus of thousands and thousands of refugees from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia to Europe, many of whom are vulnerable women, has recently reached a truly alarming scale. While all concerned governments must seek a comprehensive political response, the dramatic humanitarian situation also requires the mobilisation of NGOs and local associations, such as Soroptimist International of Europe, as is already happening in some countries.

With its more than 80,000 members, 34,000 of whom are in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Soroptimist International is the largest service organisation of professional women in the world. Since the European Federation was established in 1930, Soroptimists, whose mission is to improve the lives of women and girls, have witnessed the disastrous effects of forced migration, particularly on women.

Women and girls at high risk

Women refugees and asylum seekers commonly face the biggest challenges during their difficult journey to a refugee camp and safety, including various forms of male violence and discrimination. As women travel increasingly alone, with or without children, they suffer especially from the absence of support and protection from family and friends. Isolated from the social environment and network of their respective communities, women are thus particularly vulnerable.

Sadly, male violence is an integral part of the women refugees' experience. As reported by several institutions, displaced women and women refugees are frequently victims of rape by officials, smugglers, other refugees and traffickers. Traffickers often take advantage of the situation, and, if not forced into prostitution, migrant women may need to sell their bodies to buy food or find housing for themselves and their families.

Soroptimists witness and respond

Soroptimists are actively and concretely engaged in their respective communities throughout the 62 countries in which Soroptimist International of Europe is present. Clubs are independent and know best what works locally. Our response is never standardised but tailored to the local needs. The thousands of projects are traditionally aligned to the conditions of their respective countries and the needs of their particular displaced persons.



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Special call to Soroptimist Clubs : be active – be influential

As this new major human crisis develops, Soroptimists Clubs have two major roles to play:

1 Lobby locally, nationally and internationally

Concept: As credible witnesses to the problems confronting women and girls on a daily basis, we function as a 'global voice for women'. Soroptimists have to fulfil their duties related to the general consultative status granted by the United Nations (ECOSOC) and to the participatory status granted by the Council of Europe.

Action: More than ever, Soroptimists are committed to act as advocates for the rights and conditions of women and girls by alerting institutions and authorities about emerging issues. In the case of refugees and asylum seekers, we appeal to authorities in every country in which we are present to protect women. Examples:

Projects:

- Engage with the authorities and inform them of Soroptimists' availability to help
- Engage with leaders of asylum and migrant centres and offer help to be a voice for women and girls at local and national levels
- If a witness of or being told stories of abuse, alert local and/or national authorities on bad practices
- Join forces with other women associations at a national level
- Engage with universities to raise awareness of opportunities for young women refugees to access higher education
- At national level, expose and put pressure on governments for not putting into practice relevant laws and treaties (i.e. the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women).

2 "Adopt" a refugee or a Women's Community Centre

Concept: As professional women active in diverse sectors of the local and national economy and society, Soroptimists are highly respected in their communities, and through their strong network, they have access to many different professions.

Action: Collaborate with the leaders of Migrant Centres and other professionals to help migrant women and children gain access to the response chain of urgency (short term). In the long term, help refugees integrate rapidly into the host country's society and economy. Several great project ideas are already being implemented. Here are few examples:

Projects:

- Mobilise locally and provide a first aid response, such as providing supplies, whenever a humanitarian call is made (immediate response)
- Place special focus on women's security and prevention of violence
- Consider women's hygienic needs and assist with basic materials
- Bring together women refugees and Soroptimists, listen to their problems and offer friendship
- Help traumatised women regain self-respect and confidence
- Teach women refugees the language of the host country (long-term response)
- Help women understand their 'new' rights and obligations
- Teach women local habits and customs
- Guide women through the maze of employment
- Mentor women by sharing knowledge, networking and strengthening their skills

...as many as 8,000 people have died trying to reach Europe since 2013



Europe's refugee crisis

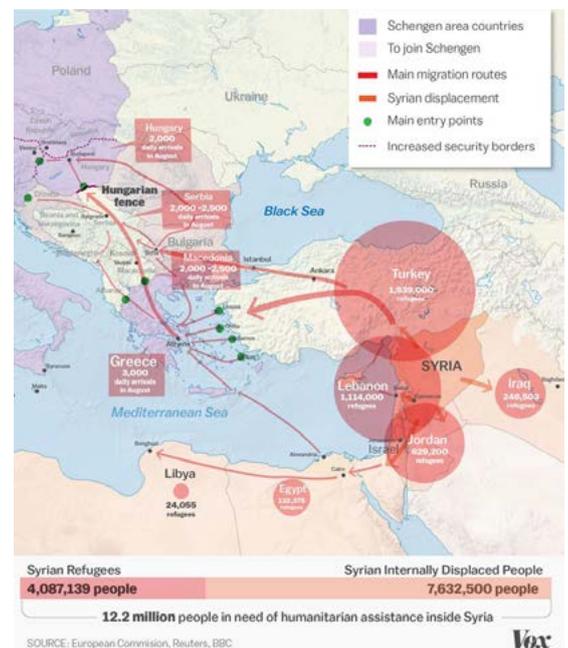
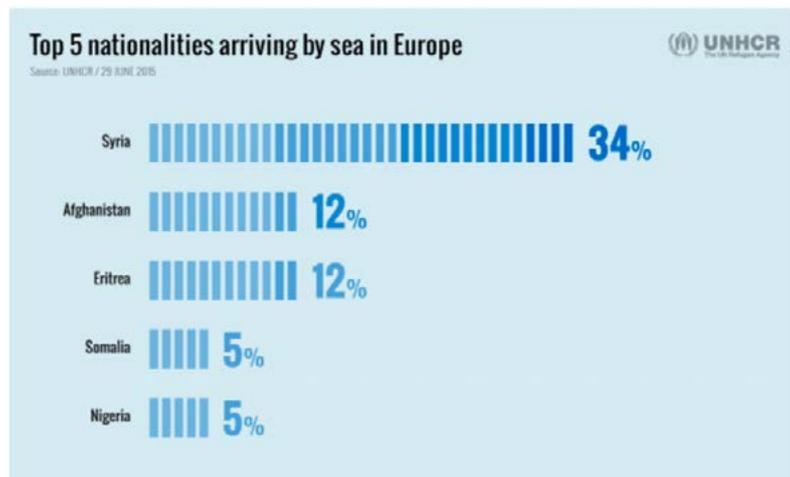
The *plight* of women migrants

© IdealPhoto30 / iStock Editorial / Thinkstock

Since 2014, we continue to read about the influx of refugees crossing by land and sea in an attempt to reach Europe. It is estimated that about one million refugees reached Europe in 2015, and 660,000 arrived in 2014.¹ Sadly, many perish on their journey. Of those who survive, many are women travelling alone with young children – often facing horrific conditions and terrifying experiences. There are many practical ways Soroptomists can help to alleviate their distress and give them hope for their future.

Who are the refugees and where do they come from?

The majority of refugees are fleeing the Syrian civil war which, since it erupted into a full-scale conflict in late 2012 has displaced just over 6 million people and resulted in the deaths of 250,000 (about half of whom were civilians).



Why are so many refugees dying?

Once refugees flee their homes, they often end up in temporary camps in neighbouring countries that are set up by governments and humanitarian agencies, like the UNHCR. These emergency camps offer little hope or protection, are often unsanitary and lack basic provision such as food and medicines.

The onward journey can be horrifyingly dangerous: many families drown crossing the Mediterranean in rickety boats. The UN Organisation for Migration estimates that as many as 8,000 people have died trying to reach Europe since 2013.¹ One third of all migrants who die during the crossing are children.¹

What conditions do refugees face on arrival?

Policies vary across Europe and governments have been hesitant to take on the responsibility of re-settling refugees. This is why they often face terrible humanitarian conditions over their travels and upon arrival. Those who do make it to Europe will most likely end up living in overcrowded camps again, facing unsanitary conditions and disease. Only 22 to 45 per cent of the centres have been 'winterised', which means people have to sleep in unheated tents or sheds at temperatures below zero. Sanitary facilities are also often inadequate.² Those who don't live in camps are also exposed: sleeping in train stations, or living in fear of deportation.

The terrible plight of women refugees and their children

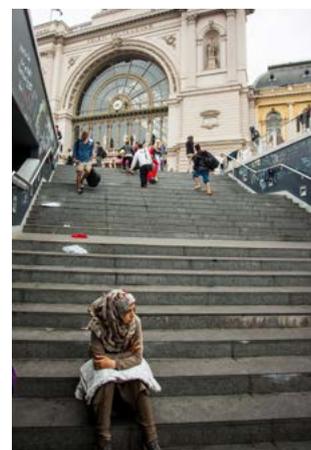
In these situations, women and children are particularly vulnerable. Women are often raped by officials, smugglers, other refugees or traffickers. There have been cases reported in Hungary of rapes perpetrated by the Balkan police.³ In addition

to the risk of sexual assault and trafficking, migrant and refugee women also resort to prostitution as a means to survive during their journey: to get a place to sleep or some food. Prostitution seems also to be widespread in the transit zones, and doctors report cases of sexually transmitted diseases.

Women refugees and asylum seekers also have trouble finding toilets and sanitary products in the countries they travel through and when they arrive in Europe. In transit zones, some authorities have set up showers, but with no hot water, no separation between women and men, and no support for babies' hygiene.³ There seems to be little to no awareness of women's needs, particularly in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and high risk of sexual assaults.

What can we do to help?

Many Soroptimist clubs are already getting involved by giving language and vocational classes to refugee children to help them integrate. Clubs can also help by supporting women and providing the sanitary and hygienic supplies that lack in arrival camps, or organising winter clothing drives to help keep children warm. Clubs and Unions that are already involved in anti-trafficking efforts could also orient their efforts to protecting vulnerable women and children.



DID YOU KNOW ?

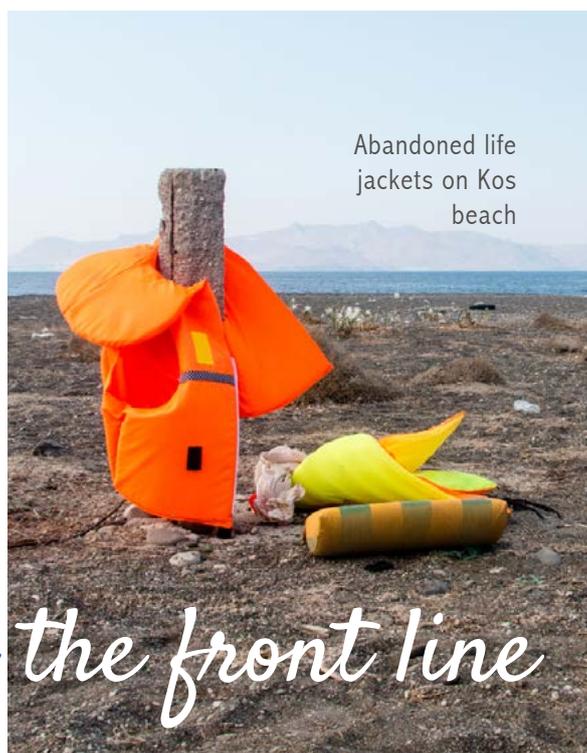
According to UNICEF, 12% of refugee women arriving in Macedonia are pregnant.

Because of the lack of drinking water in the journey and the transit zones, mostly kids, pregnant women and breastfeeding women suffer from kidney problems.

1 - UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/55ee99880.html>

2 - Van der Zee, *Al Jazeera*

3 - <http://www.womenlobby.org/Asylum-is-not-gender-neutral-the-refugee-crisis-in-Europe-from-a-feminist>



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Migration : *view from the front line*



Mary Samartzidou, President of the Soroptimist International Union of Greece, answers questions about how the current mass migration of refugees has affected Greece and how Soroptimist clubs have responded to the crisis.

The Link: *Greece, along with Italy, is an entry point to Europe for thousands of refugees. It is also one of the countries that has to deal with a dreadful humanitarian drama. How has this changed daily life in coastal towns and around the country?*

Mary: Refugees enter Greece via the eastern Aegean islands, across from Turkey: tourist islands with a very high standard of living, despite the economic crisis. Our islanders' lives changed suddenly and completely without any warning of what was about to take place. Although the tourist season was ruined because of the arrival of masses of desperate people, islanders cared for them selflessly, offering shelter, food, water and medical assistance. Working with the coastguard, they also helped save hundreds of people from drowning when their boats started to sink. Unsurprisingly, 700,000 people have signed a petition to grant the Nobel Peace Prize to those who helped. Elsewhere, already struggling to deal with the impact of the economic crisis, Greeks now face international criticism, despite absolutely no help from Europe.

The Link: *Migration affects many countries in Europe - be they countries of arrival, transit or destination. As an organisation with a wide network across Europe, how can Soroptimists better mobilise themselves and their resources to help?*

Mary: All European Soroptimists are certainly actively developing programmes to help refugees. Implementation depends, unfortunately, on how each government is responding to the refugee problem. Many countries are closing their borders, many leaders are making xenophobic statements and parliaments are taking strange decisions. All of this runs counter to the principles of humanism and solidarity. It is the first time since the Second World War that human rights are being trampled on to such an extent, whereas Europe should

be the cradle of democracy and humanism. Our role in the refugee crisis – particularly with respect to women refugees and their children, who are usually the weak link in every warfare or forced displacement of populations – is therefore more important than at any other moment in the history of Soroptimism in Europe.

The Link: *Many Soroptimist clubs have already begun projects to help refugees. Can you give us examples of actions undertaken by Greek Soroptimists?*

Mary: Clubs in Athens have gathered clothes, food and medical supplies and visited recently established refugee camps at Eleones, just outside Athens, and helped those camped out for a short time in Victoria Square, especially families with babies needing shelter from the weather.

The Volos clubs offered similar assistance to refugees crossing to Idomeni. **The Kavala club**, alongside other NGOs, welcomed refugees arriving on ships from the islands and offered them essentials before they boarded buses bound for border.

Our **Thessaloniki clubs** visited various NGOs at the border, such as the Red Cross, Red Crescent, Doctors of the World, Doctors without borders, Praxis and UNHCR to find out how they could help. The greatest need was for medical supplies for the Red Cross, and at their request we were able get them many packages of the medicines they required, helped by the Crete, central and mostly Northern Greece clubs that all sent medical supply packages to us in Thessaloniki.

At the same time, we looked out for pregnant women who might need assistance. We transported those who wanted doctors to examine them – to check that they and their babies were well – by ambulance to Kilkis, the largest regional city with



a hospital. The doctors then only let them travel onwards if all was well. We are delighted that some refugees gave birth in Kilkis, where doctors kindly accommodated relatives in local hotels, at their own expense, until mothers and babies were able to travel.

Although we looked for unaccompanied children, we weren't able to find any since everybody claimed them as their own. We had prepared foster families with the cooperation of the largest institutions in the country, to provide temporary accommodation. But no one was reported at the Idomeni borders, and those who entered institutions in Athens, disappeared the next day searching for compatriots. Once we do manage to contact them and assess their needs, we will certainly let you know about any programmes we prepare to arrange temporary residence for them in mainland Greece.

Comments made February 2016.



Women refugees *in transit*

Macedonia is a major transit country for refugees trying to reach Western Europe. Soroptimist **Katerina Vasileska**, Member of Soroptimist International **Club of Struga**, tells about the incredible strength and hope that drives so many women refugees – often travelling on their own with their children – overland through Europe.

It is now almost six years since the armed conflict started in Syria, a long period that has seen cities destroyed, thousands of people killed and others forced to flee.

Since the beginning of the conflict my country, Macedonia, has been used by refugees as a transit zone to reach the Western European countries. In those early days, there were fewer refugees but more victims. This is because they had to walk along the narrow railroad by foot, usually during the night without lights and trains would run them over.

The number of women travelling is high. Some travel with their families, but many women are traveling only with their children. The reasons vary, some say they have lost their husbands during the bombings and they decided to flee to save their lives and the lives of their children. Others say that their husband, father or brother is imprisoned and they don't have any information about them.

Volunteers told me that, because the refugees only stay in Tabanovce for a very short time (since they want to hurry along their journey toward the border with Serbia), they don't have

the opportunity to talk with them for long. However, according to Mare Bojkovska – **a volunteer** at the camp at the North State border in Tabanovce since the beginning of the exodus, Arab women are the “pillar of the house”. She has come to this conclusion after meeting pregnant women carrying two, three or more children with them, without the company of a man. “You can always see hope in their eyes. Even behind the tears you see an ocean of hope for surviving”, says Mare, They are women whose husbands are already in Europe, and are now aiming to reunite their family.

In one case, a woman had been travelling with her husband, but he passed away when they arrived in Tabanovce. She had to continue the journey alone, which was very hard for her.

All the volunteers in the camp say refugees think that, having fled their homeland and passed the Aegean sea, the suffering has passed, the smell of death is far away now – maybe this is the power that gives them the hope and courage to stay strong and continue their journey.

Comments made February 2016.



Germany, at the receiving end

Barbara Kohl, President of the SI Union of Germany, tells us how her country is facing up to the challenges of receiving over a million refugee asylum seekers and how Soroptimists are helping.

The Link: *Germany received an astounding 476,649 asylum applications in 2015. What changes did your country have to make to be able to receive so many refugees?*

Barbara Kohl: Given the speed with which so many more refugees reached Germany in the second half of 2015 – at year-end more than a million arrived – the Federal Government administration, German states and municipalities were overextended. It was not possible to process over 470,000 asylum applications, so only just over 50 per cent were approved.

In 2015 The Federal Government therefore decided:

- to push back applications from certain Eastern European countries, as rejection and repatriation were foreseeable.
- to introduce an accelerated procedure for Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis of Christian, Mandaean and Yezidi culture
- to staff BAMF more adequately.

In addition to the registration procedure, refugees need medical care, clothes, food and accommodation, as well as language courses, employment and education for their children. This is where private initiatives come in. Countless people have warmly welcomed refugees, looked after their needs and bridged the gap created by constraints on official resources.

The Link: *There's no question that Germany has done much to help. What are the challenges your country faces now in terms of what still needs to be done? How can Soroptimists help?*

Barbara: On the one hand, there is an incredible readiness to help refugees in Germany. But, on the other, there are doubts that we can really succeed.

The sheer number of different-minded people who want to come and live in the "promised land" causes fear. From my perspective, I am aware of the radicalisation of parts of German society. Discomfort and fear are higher, particularly in those regions where there are fewer foreigners. Extreme right-wing parties are gaining popularity. There is an increasing number of assaults on refugee accommodation facilities. Since the incidents on New Year's Eve in several European cities, especially in Cologne, the purchase of self-defence weapons increased dramatically.

However, we should also be aware that these incidents occur also in refugees' temporary accommodation. Female refugees need our help.

The Link: *Many German clubs have been involved in helping refugees to integrate through language courses and vocational training. Can you give us more examples of remarkable efforts?*

Barbara: German Soroptimists have been actively providing support for refugees in a number of other ways, such as

- offering jobs to refugees in their companies
- organising child care for parents attending German language courses
- organising joint activities such as dancing and singing for both refugees and Germans to stimulate intercultural exchange
- accompanying refugees to the doctors, authorities etc.

The Link: *Incidents of sexual assault and harassment in Cologne sparked much debate in the media and caused many to express anti-immigration sentiments. As a member of a women's organisation, how do you think we can fight sexual harassment and still support migrants' rights?*

Sexual harassment did not start with the arrival of refugees. It has always existed in our society. Human rights are not the rights of men! Human rights apply also to women and particularly to female refugees. Many female refugees report sexual assaults, brute force and extortion on their journeys to Europe and in refugee camps. In the latter case, criminal incidents are also triggered by severe organisational deficiencies in the camps, including in Germany. The estimated number of unreported cases is probably quite high, particularly considering that these criminal offences are not classified as such in the refugees' countries of origin. Meanwhile, female refugees seek out shelters for battered women. It is within our responsibilities as Soroptimists to support these women. **Therefore, the board of SI Germany decided to start a campaign in doctors' offices and hospitals to increase awareness among the refugee communities that all people are equal!**

Comments made February 2016.



As Soroptimists who work and speak up, day by day, to improve living conditions for women and children all over the world, we deplore the structurally humiliating situations they confront, even within our country. Women refugees take immense strains and the uncertainty of their success upon themselves, considering it as the sole loophole to save their children from death, persecution and cruel treatment. These women and children should be saved from any violence and infringement within our country, therefore all necessary dispositions must be made to ensure their privacy, so that any discriminating environment will not compromise their dignity as women.

Let's be active!

www.soroptimist.at



*“Racism is not an opinion,
it is the depth of inhumanity”*

Christa Kaltenbrunner, Union President of Austria, called on Soroptimists to provide much needed support to women refugees in a recent message on the Union of Austria's webpage

I continued my message by prompting clubs to give regional support to local projects that collaborate with NGOs operating professionally on refugee matters. Many clubs followed this call and are still helping as the situation continues. Some have pooled together, such as the **Graz Rubin and Goldes clubs**, with **club Vaduz**, to give helping hands at the Austrian borders. Soroptimist medical doctors offered primary care and support at train stations and refugee camps. Soroptimist club members give learning aid, offering to accompany refugees to government agencies, on a daily basis. Financial support is still also provided. The **Wien Donau Club** will soon celebrate its 50th anniversary and subsequently donate all donations to the PROSA project.

PROSA - Project School for All

Asylum seekers up to the age of 15 are granted the same right to education as any young Austrian. However, those older than 15 are not permitted to enter mainstream schools or any educational programme. In October 2012, PROSA was founded with the mission to provide education to those neglected by the state.

Our approach constitutes three distinct support components: educational training, social work and neighbourhood/inclusion work. The guiding principle of the educational training

programme is the successful acquisition of the national diploma (Pflichtschulabschluss). PROSA organises classes in all subjects necessary for the national diploma, as well as leisure activities. After one to two years, students are ready to take the exam. PROSA consists of a team of professionally trained teachers and also offers tutoring classes in which a number of volunteers and PROSA students study together. In addition to educational training, PROSA ensures access to professional social care for each student to support them through the multiple challenges they face.

In July 2014, PROSA reached a major milestone when all 14 of its first class of students passed the national diploma exam. By now, 53 students have already successfully passed the national diploma exam. Currently, PROSA teaches about 150 students in 12 daily classes located at two public schools in Vienna: the Gymnasium Kandlgasse in the 7th district of Vienna and the Abendgymnasium Brünner Straße in the 21st district of Vienna.

At its meeting in January, the Austrian Union Board decided unanimously to donate €12,000 to PROSA.

As for myself, I am supporting a Syrian family, whom I visit regularly, twice a week. They have six children, with a seventh due in March.

Comments made February 2016.

Union and Club *actions* to help migrants across Europe

SI VADUZ (LIECHTENSTEIN), in partnership with Clubs in Austria, Italy and Switzerland, help for refugees – we are on site



To help quickly is to help efficiently

A platform of several SI-Clubs in southern Austria is very active and continues the **'Help for refugees'** project as long as help is needed! The **'Help for refugees'** platform was created by the **SIE Clubs Vaduz** (Monika Studer, President), **Goldes Südsteiermark** (Luise Koefer, President), **Graz Rubin** (Konsul Edith Hornig, Vice President), **Zug** (CH) and **Meran** (IT) has existed for several weeks now and has collected over €44,000 in monetary donations and in-kind donations worth €10,000.

Contributions have been handed over to refugee aid workers at SOS Konvoi and to **'Gib mir deine Hand'** (Give me your hand) to help them continue their work successfully. Soroptimists also bought toiletries and sanitary products as well as baby food and diapers to cover the most urgent necessities at different locations.

Further donations to **'Help for refugees'** are most welcome and can be made to :

SIE "Flüchtlingshilfe"

IBAN: AT62 3810 2005 0006 0202

BIC: RZSTAT2G102

Raiffeisenbank Gleinstätten eGen

Monika Studer, President of **SI Vaduz**, guarantees personally that all donations will directly reach their destination. SOS Konvoi donations in kind will be driven weekly to the Croatia-Serbia-border and to the Hungarian border.

SI RINGERIKE (NORWAY) helps refugees to integrate

Being in transit as a refugee, in another country, another environment with new codes and different lifestyles can make integration and development difficult for a group of foreigners.

Soroptimists in Norway want to tackle this issue by being involved directly with the migrants arriving in their country, offering them meaningful activities and great experiences, together with Norwegian children and youths.

On an everyday basis, Soroptimists from Ringerike, arrange two hours of activities (skiing, scout activities, orienteering, cooking, etc.) in cooperation with local clubs and associations, and collect clothes for children and parents staying at a Transit Centre for asylum seekers. The club has put together a monthly activity plan, in cooperation with local school classes, NGOs, sport clubs and scouts.

Since migrants from the Transit Centre "express great joy and gratitude" as explained by the Club, the Soroptimists have recently diversified their approach by teaching knitting to women and Norwegian.

The Norwegian Soroptimists made a real change in their community and inspired other associations, since they became the largest collaborator and volunteer local group and have attracted the attention of various Norwegian Ministers for their excellent work.





SI UNION OF FRANCE, advocates for women and girls

Françoise Lathuille President of the **Union of France** and Marie-Claude Bertrand, SIE Vice President Communications and member of **SI Angoulême**, have been received in Paris at the Ministry of Women's Rights to discuss the theme of Migration. This meeting is the result of an open letter on the situation of refugee women in Europe (prepared last October by the SIE Advocacy Team) that the French Soroptimists distributed to their Government. Françoise and Marie-Claude presented the organisation to a councillor in charge of law, putting emphasis on the fact the Soroptimist movement is composed of professional women who are engaged in their communities and who work actively on improving the lives of women and girls.

They used the occasion to raise the issue of the situation in Calais (North of France) where living conditions of refugee women are horrible.

This was a very positive contact and should encourage the Union of France and Soroptimists in the entire organisation to continue and intensify lobbying at all levels to act as "a global voice for women".



Refugee academics : an unforgettable meeting

Sigrid Ag, SIE Vice President Advocacy

The European University Association (EUA) met on 23 October 2015 in Brussels. The Board adopted a statement on refugee students and academics. It calls on universities and policymakers to ensure refugees have information on educational opportunities, provide language teaching to enable them to study, and shorten "waiting periods" to higher education and related financial support.

Universities should also ensure there are flexible conditions, procedures and processes for the recognition of degrees and diplomas, periods of study and prior learning, in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Being responsible for internationalisation in education at UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, my team visited two refugee centres in the second week of February. Refugee students or academics had been invited for an information session. When entering the first venue, we were greeted by 18 men and one single woman. In the coffee break she shared her story with me. As a dentist, she had run a successful dental clinic in Damascus until it was bombed into pieces. She had no choice but to leave Syria with her three children, crossing the Norwegian/Russian border four months ago. Her dream is now to start working as a dentist in Norway and the process of recognising her diploma has begun.



16 days of activism

SIE Union and Club projects

UNION OF MADAGASCAR

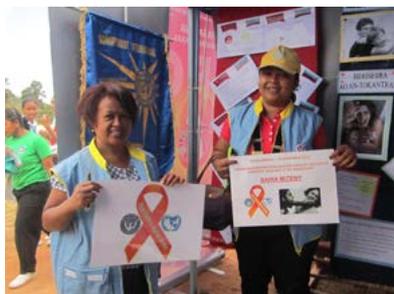
The Soroptimists of the **Antananarivo Tanamasoandro Club in Madagascar** have observed an upsurge of violence against women and girls in their society and they have decided to act!



Throughout the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, the Soroptimists participated in raising awareness in their community and at all levels (family, community, workplace, churches, associations, etc.), by distributing flyers in Malagasy, to reach as many people as possible. Over the course of the Club's activities, all members dressed in orange and wore an orange ribbon on the wrist.

The club has approached the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in Madagascar to participate in their thematic of awareness and of animation of the village community of Atsimondrano Ambalavao Antananarivo. The actions have had a great success within the targeted communities and were relayed by the local media; small girl scouts have even said at several times: "We are valuable beings!"

The Soroptimists are confident about the long term impact of such initiatives!



UNION OF ITALY

The Italian Soroptimists have been highly involved in the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence!

Almost half of the Italian clubs have also organised performances or conferences to increase awareness among citizens and also lobbied institutions on the need to eliminate violence against women to reach a true application of the Charter on Human Rights.

Among all the activities the most relevant were:

- The exhibition of banners with the Soroptimist logo showing a free number to receive assistance in case of violence
- Sponsorship of performances in theatres where a seat was covered with a red drape to signify a woman victim of violence.

In addition, many clubs have partnered with local Institutions, such as schools and universities or the city hall, to organise tutorials for health and/or social workers to improve their knowledge on the care of victims and/or aggressors. One club focused on violence towards the elderly and another on violence among migrants. Finally, one club produced a book to advise women on how to protect themselves from stalking and domestic violence.

A safe room at the police station

The **Club Torino** worked with the Regional Womens League to equip and set up **'A room just for her'** at the Torino city police station



to provide a private space for women victims of violence. This was the first time such a room had been created and it has now become a Union Project. Since 3 November 2015, three more rooms have been set up at Carabinieri stations and another five are in progress. The Italian Union has concluded a partnership agreement with all Carabinieri across Italian territory to give full support to Soroptimist Clubs, when they request it, to set up such rooms in their local police stations.

November 25th :
International Day
for the Elimination
of Violence Against
Women, to December 10th:
International Human Rights
Day = 16 Days of Activism

Here we present just a
few examples of hundreds
of actions taken by
Soroptimist Clubs to raise
awareness of these
issues in their local
communities and
countries

UNION OF SWITZERLAND

16 days of activism – The orange mobilisation!



On 28 November, the Soroptimist **Club of Genève Fondateur** (Switzerland) organised together with Solidarité Femmes, a huge event in the old town of Geneva (promenade de la Treille) – The “Orange Mobilisation”. The idea was to raise awareness on domestic violence by encouraging people

to sit down on a famous large bench in the city (more than 120 metres). The action was a great success with more than 400 people dressed in “orange” to demonstrate solidarity. The event drew the attention of the media and the Geneva’s famous “Jet d’eau” was illuminated in orange!

UNION OF GREECE

During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, Soroptimists from Greece, have managed to “ORANGE THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD” with various projects.

The members of the Soroptimist **Club of Kavala**, as members of the Committee of Gender Equality of the Municipality of Kavala, participated in various activities that took place in a central square of the town:

- Self-defense exercises for women and girls
- Paintings by students on the subject of violence against women and girls
- Distribution of informative material on violence against women
- Silent demonstrations in the streets of the town

The Club also participated on 25 November 2015 in a local TV programme “ENA CHANEL” to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women at a local level.

Furthermore, on 9 December, the Union President of Greece and members of her Board joined the Kavala Club and an 18 years-old girl to participate in a programme at the local radio station ALPHA RADIO for a discussion about the rights of women and girls.



UNION OF GERMANY

The Soroptimist International **Clubs of Buxtehude and Stade** have been involved in the organisation of several events and discussion groups in their district in the northern region of Germany.

The meetings achieved very good lobbying and public interest and combined work on Programme, Lobbying. These discussions also offered a forum to learn and share knowledge and experience and a social network for women.

Supported by local associations of women the 16 days campaign against gender-based-violence delivered much input and raised sustainable awareness and advocacy.

"The World Bank has proved that those states which take measures to improve women's conditions see their economic growth improve more quickly than states which don't take the feminine factor into consideration."

Christina Lunghi

COP21

SI France speaks up on *climate change*

Françoise Lathuille - President, SI France

Last December, France hosted the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) in Paris. The objective was 'to achieve, for the first time, a binding and universal agreement to effectively fight climate change and bring about/accelerate the transition towards low carbon, sustainable companies and economies'. Limiting global warming to below 2°C was repeatedly cited as one of the key targets.

Two days before Cop 21, France SI organised a seminar at the Mayor's offices in Paris's 9th arrondissement on the theme of: **"Climate stakes/ respect for human rights: understand and educate to make an impact"**.

Simple ways to secure global energy supply

During the first roundtable - facilitated by Audrey Berry, PhD student at CIRED*, Arnaud Westrich, Director of Collectivities and Habitat at Dalkia EDF, and Rina Dupriet**, Deputy Mayor of Buc (78530) we heard about strategies concerning energy policies and the challenges to ensure the security of global energy.

The example of the Buc commune in the Paris region illustrated how easily-implemented solutions respectful of the environment can be achieved through simple, effective and natural means and are to everyone's benefit.

Give women a voice in setting environmental policy

The second round table revolved around the participation, role and value of women in decision-making bodies and drawing up of environmental policies. The discussions were facilitated by Ulla Madsen, Immediate Past President of SIE, Christina Lunghi, Managing Director at Arborus Fund for Gender Equality in



Christina LUNGHI, Gilles BŒUF, Françoise LATHUILLE, Ulla MADSEN, Rina DUPRIET, MC BERTRAND

Europe, and Gilles Boeuf, Scientific Advisor on the environment, biodiversity and the climate to the Minister for Ecology.

In her brilliant talk, Ulla Madsen, SIE Past President, stressed the vital importance of women's education and women's leadership when it comes to environmental issues. Likewise, Gilles Boeuf highlighted women's education and the major role women have in putting the brakes on climate change.

There is still a very long road to travel before we arrive at a fair world and sustainable development for everyone. The many initiatives undertaken by Soroptimists worldwide are evidence of this desire for a better world. Putting together adaptation strategies and be-spoke resource management, procuring access to safe drinking water, sanitation, solar energy, micro credit... their projects initiate and accompany change wherever they are implemented. In this way they are creating tomorrow's world. Certainly women have a place at the table and a role to play.

* CIRED : Centre International de Recherches sur l'Environnement et le Développement
** Rina DUPRIET : Rep.SI UNESCO, Présidente SI-UF 2006/2008, Vice Présidente SIE 2009/2011

Soroptimists engage

Dutch and Belgian Soroptimists join climate march

From 1 to 28 November 2015, 25 Soroptimists from Holland and Belgium took part in the Climate March from Utrecht to Paris "URGENDA". The "SOROPTIMISTS GO GREEN" team dressed in fluorescent green vests and handed out over 500 Soroptimist flyers. They did the walk to draw attention to the dire consequences of climate change and highlight the Soroptimist commitment to this cause. At Goussainville, 24km from Paris, they were joined by the President of SI France and Françoise Bellocq, Head of Communications SI France. They arrived in Paris on 28 November at around 4pm and later attended the SI France conference.

Fulfilling our potential

Anna Wszelaczynska, Vice President SIE - Eastern Europe Extension



Eastern Europe – we don't like to be called that. We feel we belong to Europe, a Europe without adjectives. Even though we're a little different, with features that we even find irritating ourselves, afraid of strangers, a fear of the unknown, unable to build a civil society. Many of us think the old world B.C. (Before Changes) was safer.

But we do have potential. Although it's been 25 years since the fall of communism, let's remember that Moses spent 40 years wandering through the desert with his people. Give us time. Give us a chance to adjust.

Most of us enjoy every minute of time when things depend on us, when we can help to change the world. This is why we became Soroptimists: to change our surroundings, to improve, to support those who can't cope.

As the first wave of enthusiasm has ended, it's now time to get more practical. We need to find new ways to operate. My main goal is to introduce new actions that are less about collecting money and more about influencing change. The main theme of the Biennium, provides excellent opportunities. Educate women, girls

and men. We need to persuade the press and social media to help us achieve our goals.

A team comprising Flavia Pozzolini, Bettina Hahne, Christine Cromwell-Anrens, Annie Simon and myself are tasked with putting it in place. Having drawn up the brief we are now inviting submissions from several public relations agencies.

Revamping our website by improve the UIEs, particularly in commercials, strong and creative working for women and that it also provides a platform for enforcing ties between the Union and individual Club Websites. "A dream you dream together is reality", so let's do it!

In Lisbon, the governors voted in favour of a publicity campaign to promote our image as an influential NGO that improves the lives of women and girls. Elsewhere we are making a concerted effort to improve our internal communications and to disseminate our news and widely amongst Union and individual Club presidents, governors and commission officials, so that they in turn can diffuse our news to all their members.

Improving our image and communications

Engaging in social media is a regular, sustained and quality communications via social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and to help with your media relations.

Marie Claude Bertrand, SIE VP Communications

Better internal communications. In Lisbon, the governors voted in favour of a publicity campaign to promote our image as an influential NGO that improves the lives of women and girls. Elsewhere we are making a concerted effort to improve our internal communications and to disseminate our news and widely amongst Union and individual Club presidents, governors and commission officials, so that they in turn can diffuse our news to all their members.

The Pre-Governors' Meeting: Several Fora



A rich agenda is in preparation, designed to ensure great participation and interaction between the Federation Board, the Union Governors and Presidents, and

all participants. The pre-Governors' Meeting will be an opportunity for us to discuss our new Constitutions and the leaner structure of our organisation together. Forums will be organised during the afternoon of **Friday July 8th** for Presidents, Governors and Delegates to *debate, share and contribute*. Time will also be dedicated to our brand identity and working together towards the future of our organisation's image. In addition, there will be a few training sessions when Board Members responsible for Programme, Advocacy and Extension will be available to answer any question you may have.



SIE Governors meeting, 8 - 10 July 2016

Bulgaria: Host country of the Governors' Meeting

This year, the Governors' Meeting will take place from Saturday 9 July to Sunday 10 July with a pre-meeting starting on the Friday 8 July. A wonderful opportunity to discover Sofia and its surroundings and to honour the Union of Bulgaria, its Clubs and members for their outstanding projects!

A rich agenda is in preparation, which aims at engaging all participants in great interaction. Amongst many other items, it will be an opportunity to discuss together our new Constitution and the leaner structure of our organisation. Forums will be organised during the afternoon of Friday 8 July for Presidents, Governors and Delegates to debate, share and contribute. Time will be allocated to our proposed communications campaign

so we can work together on the future image of our organisation. Finally, we will celebrate in more depth what is the core of the Soroptimist engagement: Union and Club projects!

The meeting will be hosted in the National Palace of Culture of Sofia, where accommodation has been arranged.

GM open to more Soroptimist participants

As announced by President Maria-Elisabetta in her last letter to the governors, the GM and its side events are open to other participants. In addition to the Union Presidents, Governors and two Silent Observers (5 official participants), a few "GM Guests" (silent too) will be accepted. Note that those will be accepted on a first come, first

served basis - within the respect of equity across geographies. The selection of participants or dissemination of this new invitation is up to the Unions and Single Clubs Presidents - it is however recommended for those with functions such as Programme Directors or Communications officers. Kindly note that unless specified rapidly by the Union President to SIEHQ, any member from the Federation could be accepted.

Interested?

Please first liaise with your President and then apply!

Registration forms can be obtained at siehq@soroptimisteurope.org

Leadership Academy for young women



Soroptimists from the **Struga club** (FYROM) and from the Union of Turkey decided to create an educational environment to help young women to feel empowered to prevent discrimination, take care of themselves and help others. This ten-day event of workshops, presentations and activities helped 28 young women from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds to understand what it means to be a leader and to serve a community. Soroptimists from several countries volunteered their time to organise the event and coach participants. Costs were covered by the Unions/Clubs that sent candidates to the Academy (Soroptimist International of Europe Best Practice Awards - BPA winner 2015)

Leadership for women – build your career



For more than 30 years the **Union of Italy** has been working in the area of education and leadership to empower young graduate women under 28 by offering them a three-day course which provides participants with tools to enhance their talent, communicate more effectively and create a more constructive career path with a member acting as a mentor. Each Italian club selects a young woman to attend the course held in Milan at SDA Bocconi School of Management. The costs are entirely financed by the Union of Italy (Soroptimist International of Europe Best Practice Awards - BPA winner "Educate to Lead Award" 2013).



Lake Ohrid, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

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Support our 2016 Leadership Academy in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Katerina Vasilevska, SI Struga, Academy President

SI Struga and SI Turkey have great pleasure to announce the third Soroptimist Leadership Academy to be held from 10 to 20 July 2016 on the shores of the UNESCO world heritage site of Lake Ohrid in Macedonia.

In this world of turmoil, with its conflicts and unhappiness and all kinds of threats and suffering we, as women and Soroptimists, have the unique privilege and responsibility to empower women in the midst of all this chaos and continue the mission of Suzanne Noël – our Godmother!

Empowering women to stand up for themselves

Our greatest weapon is education, not any kind of education but **leadership education**. This is the most effective way we can help prevent further discrimination and victimisation of girls and women: by giving them the skills and tools to stand up for themselves.

Inspired by our SI President and a great supporter of the Academy, Yvonne Simpson, in Educate to Lead, and of our SIE President, Maria Elisabetta de Francisci's biennium theme *Soroptimist Invest in Education* and some creative ideas such as *A Christmas gift? Invest in a scholarship*, we offer you an excellent opportunity to **support their vision** and help us make this year's Academy a resounding success.

How you can help

As a dedicated Soroptimist you can help motivate and inspire a third group of young women to discover their leadership potential through the Academy. We invite you to share your professional and life experiences, passion and inspiration to help us make this the best Soroptimist project ever.

You can:

- be a **presenter** and inspire 30 young women (age 18-30)
- **sponsor** young women to participate, or
- just **visit** and enjoy the Soroptimist atmosphere and our beautiful UNESCO recognised Lake Ohrid region.

Find out more

To find out more about this year's Leadership Academy, and how to apply to be a presenter or sponsor, visit www.soroptimistmacedonia.com or email soroptimist.macedonia@gmail.com.





Calendar

New SIE Clubs to be chartered

30 April 2016

Rosenheim (Germany)

Charter presented by Elisabeth Meisinger,
SIE Extension Committee Member
Club President - Barbara Mütter
Phone: +49 8034 706 7186
Email: muetter@bpx.de

21 May 2016

Meschede (Germany)

Charter presented by Renate Smith-Kubat,
SIE Representative to the EWL
Club President - Christine Schlering-Bertelsmeyer
Phone: +49 174 437 42 95
Email: c.schlering-bertelsmeyer@gmx.de

28 May 2016

Davos Prättigau (Switzerland)

Charter presented by Renata Trottmann Probst,
SIE President Elect
Club President - Bernadette Felix
Phone: +41 81 414 82 56
Email: bfelix@spitaldavos.ch

3 June 2016

Nîmes (France)

Charter presented by Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis,
SIE President
Club President - Françoise Arnal
Email: farnal@hotmail.fr

18 June 2016

Düsserldorf-Oberkassel (Germany)

Charter presented by Gerda Rosiers,
SIE Extension Chairperson
Club President - Belinda Steiert
Phone: +49 211 176 8920
Email: kanzlei_steiert@yahoo.de

Forthcoming SIE events

21 April 2016

50th Anniversary - SI Wien Donau (Austria)

24 April 2016

50th Anniversary - SI Reggio Calabria (Italy)

25 April 2016

50th Anniversary - SI Siracusa (Italy)

29-30 April & 1 May 2016

French-language days in Lyon (France)

4 May 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Firenze Due (Italy)

4 May 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Traunstein (Germany)

19 May 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Kumasi (Ghana)

25 May 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Cividale del Friuli (Italy)

1 June 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Bad Nauheim (Germany)

1 June 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Madrid (Spain)

9 June 2016

50th Anniversary - SI Levanger (Norway)

29 June 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Bielsko-Biala (Poland)

29 June 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Fricktal (Switzerland)

9-10 July 2016

Governors' Meeting - Sofia (Bulgaria)

14 September 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Oldenburg (Germany)

21 September 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Chianciano-Montepulciano (Italy)

21 September 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Brno (Czechia)

28 September 2016

25th Anniversary - SI Milazzo (Italy)

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Subscription forms are available on the SIE website www.soroptimisteurope.org or from Headquarters: siehq@soroptimisteurope.org. A reminder to subscribers (individuals or clubs): any change of address should be communicated to SIE headquarters in Geneva (72, route de Florissant, CH -1206 Geneva, Fax: +41 22 789 04 43). If undelivered magazines are returned because of an incorrect address, we cannot assume responsibility for re-sending.

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