

# **SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021**

Soroptimist



International of Europe



# ANNUAL REPORT

2020 -2021

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# WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am presenting here the report for the year 2020/2021, a very challenging year. We, Soroptimists are social creatures, so the inability to travel, meet and fundraise was extremely depressing for us. On top of that, there were growing needs for projects and a very urgent necessity to integrate our own members. We didn't want to leave anyone behind.

Advocating for women's rights became imperative as domestic violence was increasing all around Europe. We have undertaken several steps, such as writing statements and letters to important governing bodies. We are proud to have met the Secretary General of the UN and to have our activities recognised by the European Commission.

Unions and Clubs have undertaken advocating activities and organised very visible campaigns on a larger scale than usual (increase of 65%). The most well-known are 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and International Women's Day. Unfortunately, the number of projects and resources raised decreased, but Violence Against Women and Education remaining a core area of focus, in line with the Federation's strategy.

The situation sped up our learning of digital technologies. They have provided enormous opportunities like launching on-line meetings for all members, organising training events, chartering e-clubs and last, but not least, the September Celebration – a festive meeting for all to show our achievements when awards to clubs and individuals were presented. A special mention to Bettina Scholl-Sabatini,



winner of the Centenary Award, for her outstanding contribution to women and girls. This was also a good opportunity to boast best practices. It was combined with a very important workshop on female rivalry run by two outstanding people, a coach and an author: Frank Cummins and Dr. Amber Tichenor.

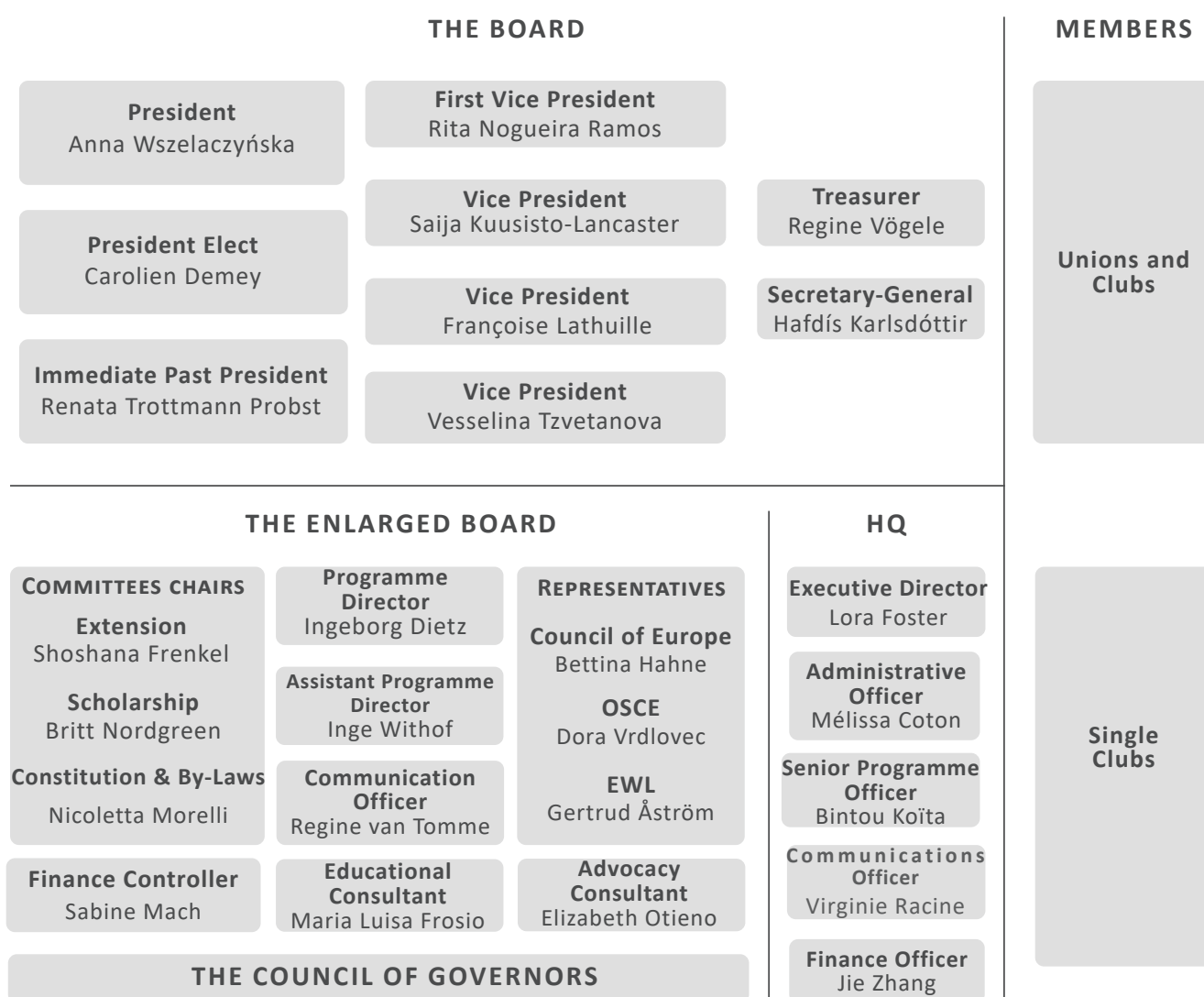
Communications had reached a level never seen before. There were posts on social media carefully targeting an audience and specific goals allowed for a significant increase of followers. Our profile is now showing our activities, professional women advocating for women's rights and providing Leadership Academy participation, scholarships and mentoring to younger or less experienced ones. The scholarship policy is changing, there were less grants awarded, but the amounts were larger. It is a good trend, as one can achieve more having more money awarded.

I am very proud that at the last Governors' Meeting a new Constitution and By-Laws were voted, the first since 1992, a true common success, where everyone contributed working side by side. It will make us ready for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Anna Wszelaczyńska'.

Anna Wszelaczyńska  
SIE President 2019-2021

# ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



# ABOUT

**30'977**

**Professional  
women**

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**1'113**

**Clubs**

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**43**

**Countries**

## **SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL of Europe**

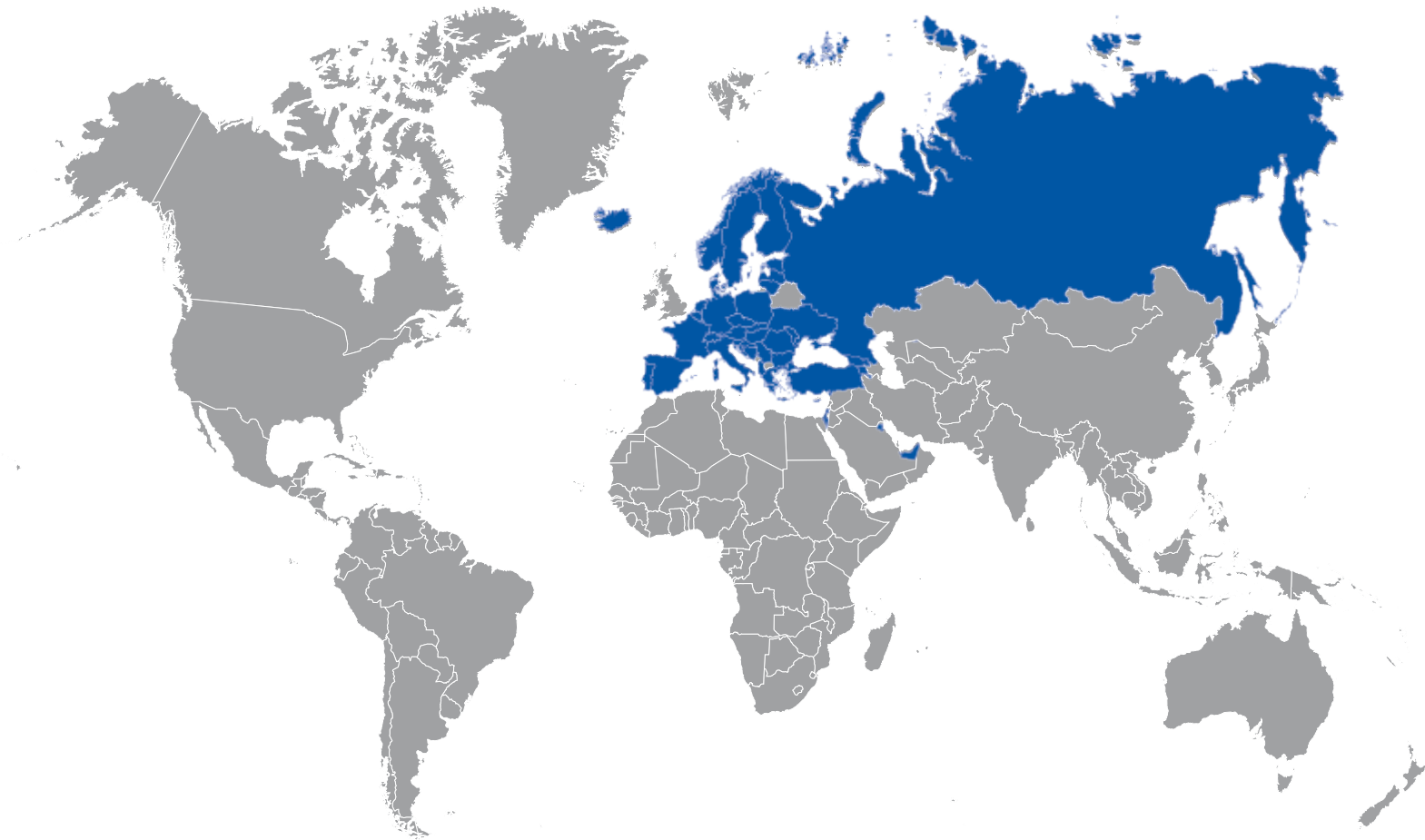
Soroptimists educate, empower and enable women and girls to improve their lives. Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is a network of 30'977 professional women who work together at local, national and international levels to achieve this aim. SIE currently has 1'113 Clubs, operating across 43 countries in Europe, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. It is the largest of the five Federations making up Soroptimist International, which counts around 70'000 women as members.

Our ambition is to transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities. We want to see women and girls achieve their individual and collective potential, realise their aspirations, and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide. As Soroptimists, we strive for the advancement of women's status, high ethical standards, Human rights for all, equity development and peace through the advancement of international understanding and good will.

One of the ways we achieve this is through advocacy. Soroptimist International of Europe holds general consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and participatory status at the Council of Europe and the European Women's Lobby. SIE also participates in the work of OSCE through its permanent representatives. This allows SIE to advocate at the international level and lobby for the ratification and implementation of treaties concerning women. We also demand that priority issues for women receive their rightful place on the sustainable development agenda.

Our members include women of all ages, representing a wide range of professions. As such, we are a platform to share our knowledge and experience. We want to ensure that all women and girls have the opportunity to become leaders in their communities, and we will continue to lobby for them at all levels of society.

# WHERE WE ARE



**43**

countries

**21**

Unions

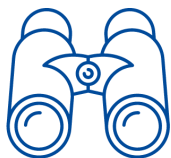
**52**

Single Clubs

Europe **49**

The Caribbean & Middle East **3**

African Unions and Single Clubs, that were part of SIE, joined the new Federation of Soroptimist International of Africa (SIAF) in the summer of 2020.



# OVERVIEW 2020-2021

During the pandemic we could observe a significant increase of domestic violence and a backlash in women's rights. Under lockdown, closed with their perpetrators, women suffered increasing domestic violence. Unfortunately it happened all around Europe. In many countries, patriarchal societies were limiting women's right to decide for themselves.

There were global shock waves when Turkey announced the annulment of the Istanbul Convention. There are so many myths and vile superstitions around this document that it is difficult to differentiate what is fake and what is true. In addition, there are several religious extremist organisations that knowingly lie and threaten societies of the dangers of the Istanbul Convention. Against some opinions, this document is not anti-religion, it is not destroying families. True – it is fighting stereotypes and recognises violence as violation of human rights.

Although Soroptimist International is a non-political organisation, we defend women's rights, we can't stay silent when things happen.

The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive tool to protect women against violence. It is based on 4 P's, 4 pillars:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Prosecution
- and integrated Policies

It covers all sorts of violence, physical, psychological, economic, sexual, neglect and most recent: its digital dimension.

It's time to demystify it, educate our own members and general public, and convince them it is not a political document, but a way to stand up for women.



As we were not meeting in person and not travelling, the first year of the biennium brought some financial surplus. Our governing body, at the SIE Governors' Meeting agreed in July 2021 to spend part of the surplus on educational sessions on the Istanbul Convention. By educating Soroptimists, especially in countries where governments are threatening to withdraw, they can produce stronger and better social media campaigns in their local languages. Unified visual formats and guidelines for social media campaigns will be produced. Trainers will be trained to disseminate the knowledge. Hopefully each Union will appoint an ambassador to train Clubs. Through educating our members about the Istanbul Convention, they can be knowledgeable and impactful ambassadors.

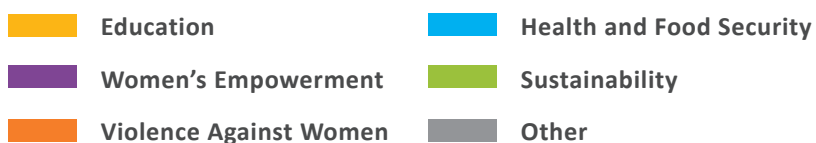
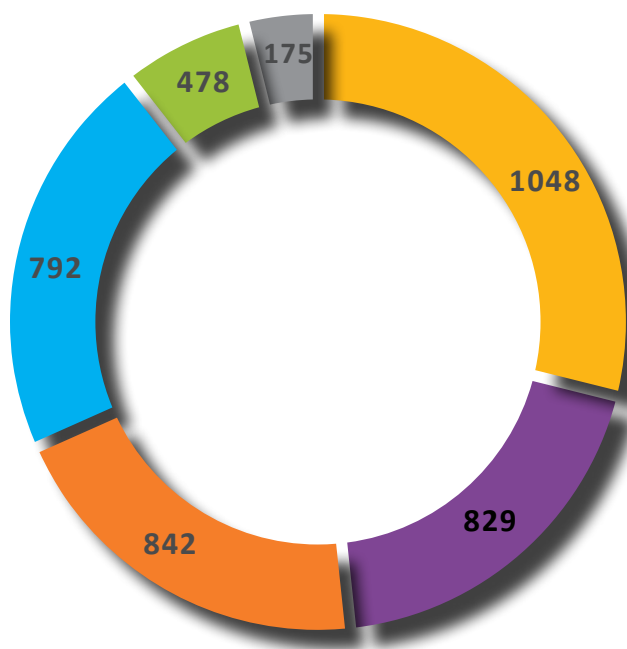
We have potential for change with 1'113 clubs, over 30'000 members. Hope we will make a change!



## OUR PROJECTS

Single Clubs and Unions implement projects that focus on five main areas.

### PROJECTS BY AREA OF FOCUS

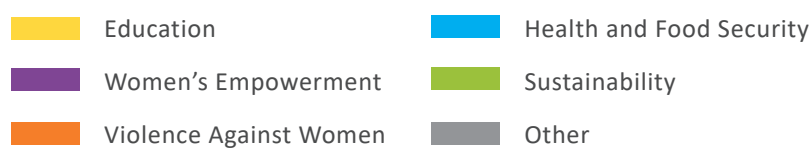
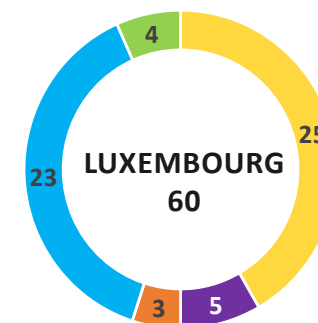
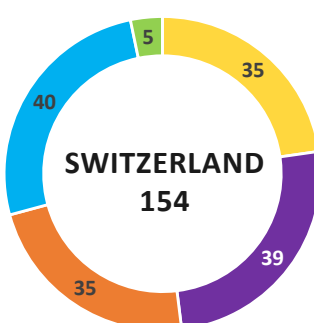
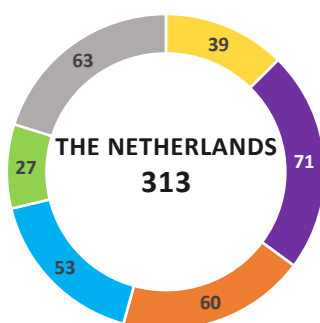
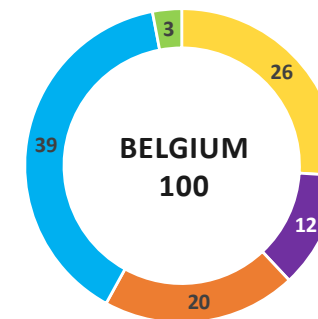
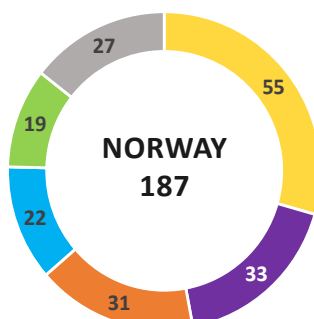
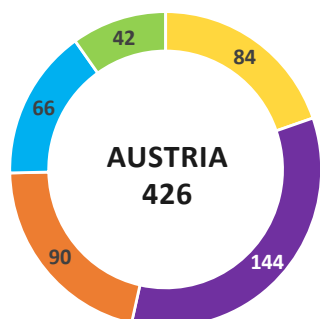
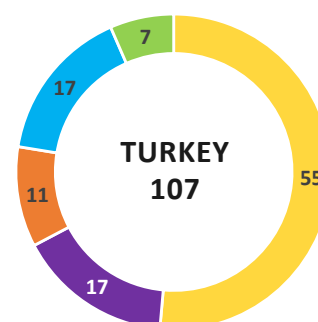
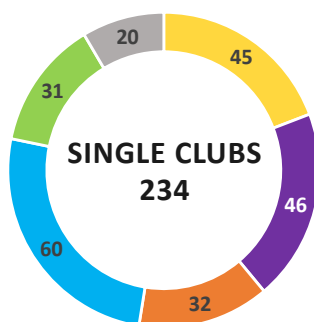
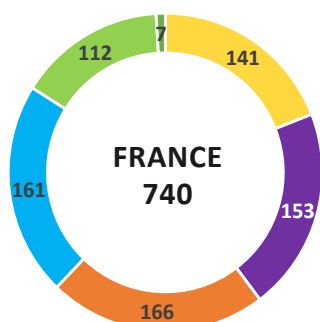
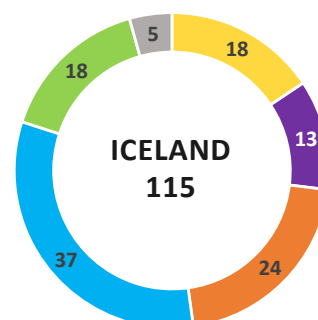
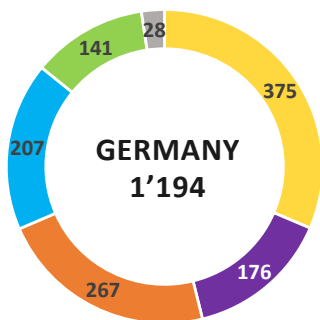


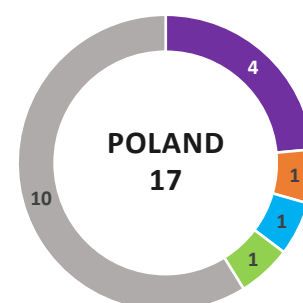
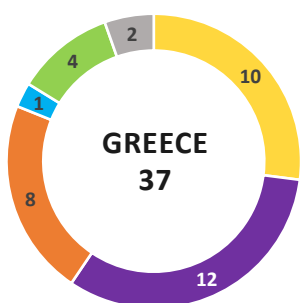
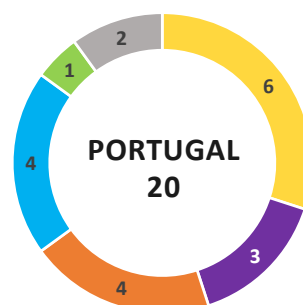
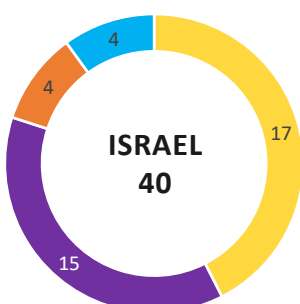
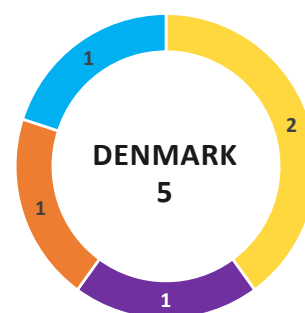
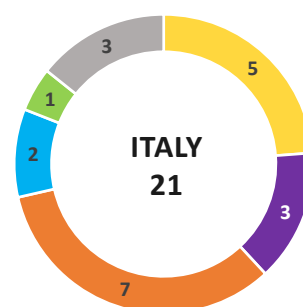
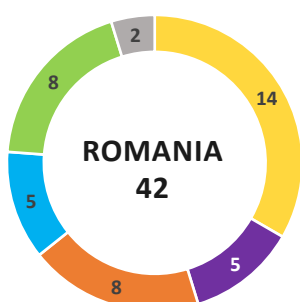
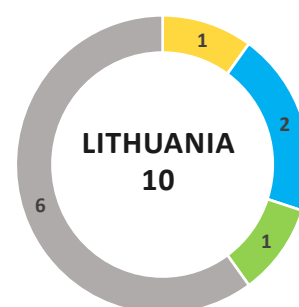
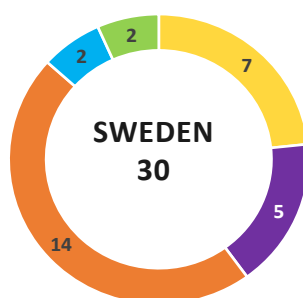
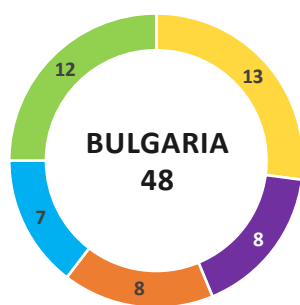
From October 2020 to September 2021, SIE members raised

**5'503'181 €**

and carried out **4'164** projects.









# BEST PRACTICE AWARDS

**SPECIAL SIE  
BIENNIUM AWARD  
2020-2021**

**Funds raised by the  
Union**

**2'000 €**

**Women & girls  
reached**

**35**

## **SOROPTIMIST FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF MEMBERS - THE E-CLUB**

### **Union of Italy**

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

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

The Italian Union saw the importance of embracing technology and drove the project forwards as its main sponsors. Soroptimist e-Club Milano Net Lead kicked off this revolutionary membership within the Union of Italy with a ceremony in Milan, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019. It became a real Club on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2021, when SIE President Anna Wszelaczyńska chartered the official foundation of the SI Club Milano Net Lead.

The first Soroptimist e-Club is made up of a motivated and determined group of women, all under the age of 35. Inspired by Soroptimist's ideals, these driven, professional women decided to unite through an e-Club.



## UNION BEST PROJECT

Funds raised by the  
Union

4'400 €

Women & girls  
reached

89

## FROM A SINGLE SPARK A GREAT FLAME CAN GROW

### Union of Turkey

According to UNESCO, 45% of young people currently live below the poverty line globally. In addition, 123 million of them, (61% of them girls), are illiterate and therefore deprived of access to many opportunities. In a world of social and economic disparities, these factors limit their chances of growing up and contributing to the development of their country. The situation is even more worrying for young girls, who often face gender-based discrimination.

There was no doubt in the minds of the Soroptimists of Turkey that it was necessary to equip young girls with solid skills to support their development and empowerment. These skills, once acquired, would open doors to a promising future.

They initiated 'Spark' - a coaching programme for the young scholars they mentor throughout the 35 clubs of the Turkish Union. In collaboration with ICF Turkey (a Turkish coaching NGO), the Soroptimists selected students in their final year of university.

This project was conducted three times in 2019 and twice in 2020. Due to its success and the high demand to take part, the Turkish Soroptimists have started organising its fourth edition, with 49 scholars.



## **‘SPECIAL PRIZE COVID-19’ AWARD**

**Funds raised by the  
Club**

**4'000 €**

**Women & girls  
reached**

**over 100**

## **EDUCATION OF INFECTION CONTROL AMBASSADORS**

### **Club of Follo (Norway)**

Solidarity is not easy when a large number of the foreign population living in Norway does not master the national language and is therefore unfamiliar with the recommendations imposed by the health crisis.

The goal of Soroptimists in Follo was to educate and contain the spread of the virus within this sometimes-forgotten local foreign community. In collaboration with Voluntary Central, Sanitary Women and the Red Cross, they arranged a course to teach foreign women living in Norway about the infection control rules. Nineteen women were chosen as infection control ambassadors and trained by health professionals. The ambassadors were asked to educate their families, friends and communities on COVID-19 sanitation measures.

To carry out this project, the Soroptimists: raised funds, selected and hired professional trainers, facilitated the course and meetings, arranged a follow-up course.

More than a hundred people have benefited from this project. This initiative is not only crucial to remove obstacles aimed at protecting the most vulnerable populations, but also necessary to promote an equal and efficient recovery from COVID-19.





# TOP PROJECTS

## EDUCATION

**Funds raised by the Club**

**5'000 €**

**Women & girls reached**

**2'000**

## NO MORE WAR! FROM VICTORY TO PEACE

**Club of Lauterbach-Vogelsberg (Germany)**



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

A statue of a lion stands majestically on a central square in the city of Lauterbach (Hessen). Symbol of strength and victory, it became the focal point of this project, with its transformation into a visual expression of peace. Since 2018, on International Day of Peace (21 September) the lion has been 'dressed' to embody peace.

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

# TOP PROJECTS

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Funds raised by the  
Clubs

1'392 €

Women & girls  
reached

223

## UNITING TO MAKING GIRLS' DAY 2020 COUNT

Club of Nokia, Tammerkoski, Tampere, Valkeakoski  
(Finland)



In February 2020, the Soroptimist Finnish Clubs from Nokia, Tammerkoski, Tampere and Valkeakoski, joined forces. They set about developing a programme for 'Girls' Day 2020' (aligned with the United Nations International Day of the Girl Child).

The main objective was to support the activities of the local Girls' House, which provides girls from 12 to 28 with activities free of charge. The clubs did this by organising creative workshops and offering informative presentations aligned with their chosen theme for Girls' Day of 'Creativity and its empowering and educational significance for girls'.

Project plans had to be adapted, due to COVID-19 restrictions, and Girls' Day became 'Girls' Day Week'. It did not stop 43 girls from taking part and benefiting from the workshops on: IT and social media, well-being, dance, textile art.

In a show of local support, the General Hospital of Valkeakoski and the Lojer Group Ltd. bought articles designed by girls during workshops. The girls of today supported those of tomorrow, with the 1,392€ proceeds from the sales being donated to the Girls' House to cover summer activities for 180 girls.

# TOP PROJECTS

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### Funds raised by the Club

1'623 €

### Funds raised by partners

950 €

### Women & girls reached

42

## WOMEN'S SAFE HOUSE – A LOT OF HARD WORK AND A LITTLE BIT OF MAGIC

Club of Costa del Sol (Spain)

### Nueva herramienta para ayudar a las víctimas que sufren *violencia de género*

Soroptimist Internacional, en colaboración con el área de Extranjeros, entrega a la Guardia Civil una guía de actuación para los casos de mujeres extranjeras

Micaela Fernández  
Aunque ya se había dado a conocer, oficialmente la Guardia Civil de Mijas ya tiene en su poder el Libro Mágico elaborado por la asociación de mujeres Soroptimist Internacional, en colaboración con el Departamento de Extranjeros del Ayuntamiento de Mijas. "Se trata de una guía de actuación que le permite a la Guardia Civil saber cómo actuar en los casos de violencia de género cuando las víctimas son mujeres extranjeras", explicó la secretaria



Domestic violence isolates those experiencing it, something which is worsened for women who are foreign to the country they live in. By assisting women going through domestic violence, the Soroptimists of Costa del Sol ensure they get the help they need, wherever they are from. During the acute phase of the crisis that means arranging for emergency accommodation, food, and a go-bag for survivors and their children. Trained Soroptimists assist foreign women survivors with insufficient Spanish to navigate their way through the Spanish system. They are given support with paperwork, official visits to authorities, medical and psychological assistance, legal representation, financial assistance or aid in finding employment, as well as put in contact with schools, if children are involved.

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

# TOP PROJECTS

## HEALTH & FOOD SECURITY

Funds raised by the  
Club

1'850 €

Funds raised by  
partners

1'050 €

Women & girls  
reached

85

## CLEAN WELLS MEAN CLEAN WATER

### Clubs of Chernihiv (Ukraine)

The Ukrainian Soroptimists of SI Chernihiv took concrete action to improve water supply, when the authorities of the district of Kulykivka contacted them with an official request for help. The situation with wells supplying water to two villages in the area had become critical. There is no centralised water supply system in this district, therefore the population use excavated wells. In summer water disappears from most of the wells. Many women, who generally bear the task of collecting water for their households, are therefore left without access to quality water. In these remote areas, where women are predominant, most live below the poverty line, are elderly and disabled. Wells are vitally important to daily survival, as they are the only source of water. Through the Soroptimists' Clean Wells initiative, 10 wells were cleaned – improving water supply for 85 women and girls.

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





## MENTORING

94

mentorships  
offered

290

Soroptimist  
mentors

187

Soroptimist  
mentees

305

Non-Soroptimist  
mentees

52

Non-Soroptimist  
mentees who became  
Soroptimists







# ADVOCACY

During the last biennium, circumstances have demonstrated that Soroptimists are mostly needed out there in this world and that it is imperative we continue firmly to STAND UP FOR WOMEN!



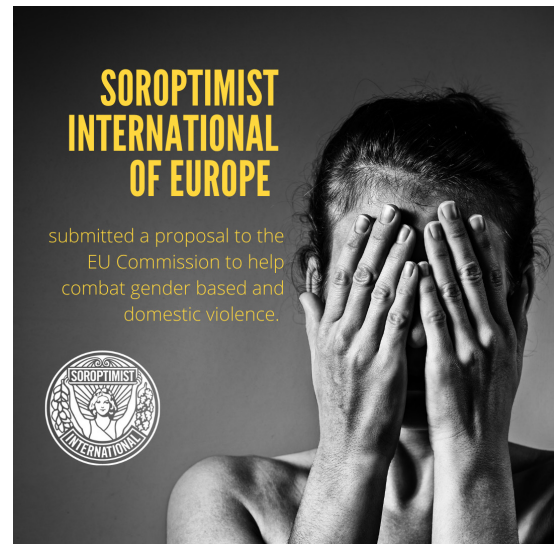
We were shocked about serious problems faced by women:

- The increase of rates of violence against women after exceptional circumstances as Covid-19 lockdowns;
- Emerging forms of violence,
- The CoE Istanbul Convention threats and withdrawals obliterating women's rights to a life free of violence;
- Seeing women prohibited to educate themselves as they want;
- Being persecuted merely because of being women, women being forced to be silent or wear a burka, living without self-determination, others not being able to hold certain professions;
- Lack of reproductive rights or health;
- Governments denying equal pay;
- Care work being marginalised;
- Refugees crises, as in Afghanistan.

It is not acceptable how slowly and the huge effort it takes to achieve tangible results for equality.

## Doing nothing was not an option for us!

From simple talks, regular zoom meetings, webinars and working groups, posts on social media, we included the topics of equality and women's rights at the center of all our conversations.



## Our SIE Advocacy emerged unified:

- Standing up for all countries to be bound to the Istanbul Convention;
- Participating as much as possible in learning about equality, in the SIE and SI webinars where the importance of our Representatives at the Council of Europe, OSCE and European Women's Lobby was raised;
- Translating the SI statement for CSW and sharing it;
- Raising awareness and mobilisation during the Orange the World;
- Informing women of the help lines in case of violence;

- Sending our statements to decision makers and to Embassies;
- Calling for the ratification of ILO 190 to end violence and harassment in the world of work; For the first time in Soroptimist history, Soroptimists personally met the UN Secretary-General;
- On International Women's Day, the President of the EU Commission, Mrs. Ursula Von Der Leyen, took knowledge of our statement, thanking us for being active towards a more equal world;
- Our task group participated in the EU Commission strategy for a proposal of a Directive on preventing and combatting gender-based violence and domestic violence;
- We finalised a Advocacy Manual;
- We addressed a position paper on sensitive topics and the understanding

about if and how our member Soroptimists should address the issues of prostitution, abortion and surrogacy, because our 100 years organisation relies on principles which we should not damage.

Soroptimist's advocacy has been perseverant and consistent. It is sure a catalyst for change. It is like a revelation, mostly because of the pandemic and how much it was needed from us all to be more united, to adapt, to be flexible, but continuing to push forward so, so much.



*Left to right: Alexandra Silva, Ana Sofia Fernandes (EWL's Vice-President), António Guterres (UN Secretary-General), Mary Collins, Hafþís Karlsdóttir (SIE Secretary-General 2019-2021)*



## FUNDS

SIE has established funds to allocate resources to specific areas of work.

### **SIE Scholarship Fund**

The Federation awards grants totaling in excess of 100,000 € per year to young women covering needs such as university fees, vocational training, and general support during studies. In memory of our founding President, the Dr Suzanne Noel Scholarship Fund provides financial assistance to female doctors to perfect their knowledge of, and experience in, plastic and reconstructive surgery.

### **SIE Disaster Recovery Fund**

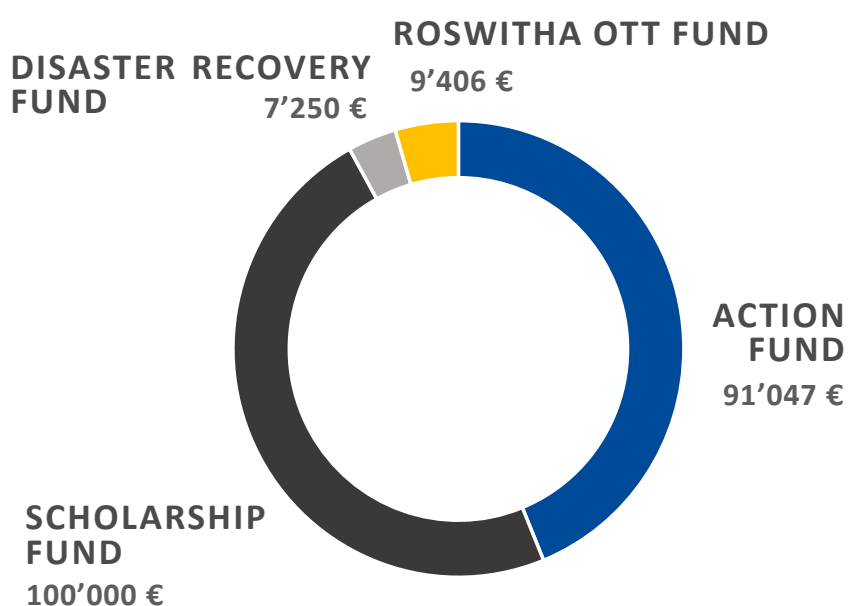
targets the specific needs of women and girls recovering from the effects of natural disasters and armed conflicts.

### **SIE Action Fund**

supports humanitarian projects and promotes educational programmes.

### **Roswitha Ott Fund**

provides health care and education to children with special needs and children in need as well as financial assistance.





# SCHOLARSHIP

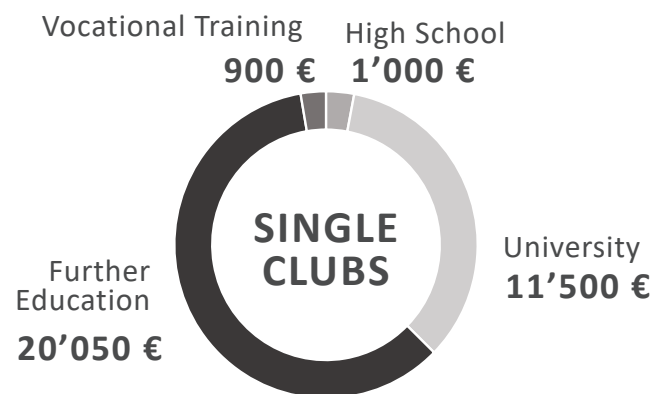
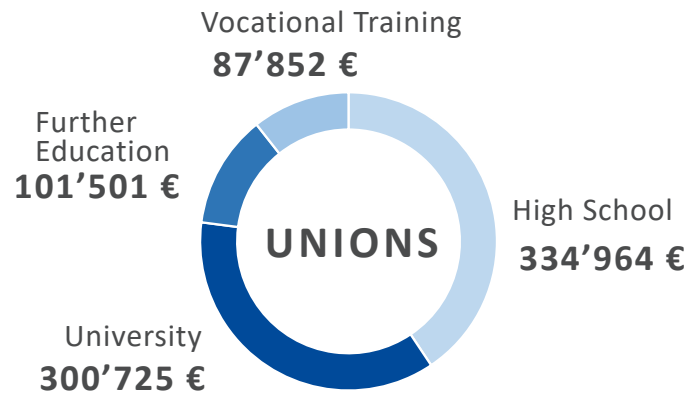
1'255

SCHOLARSHIPS  
GRANTED  
BY UNIONS &  
SINGLES CLUBS

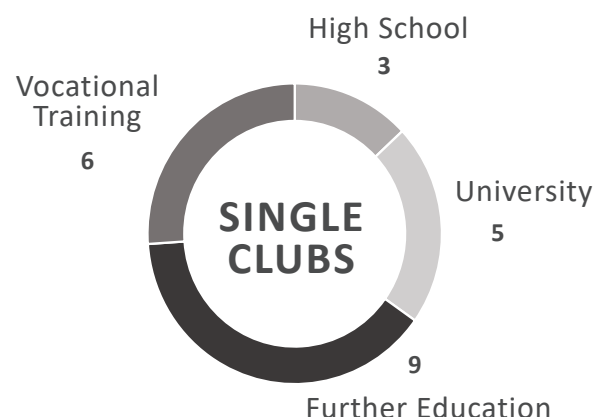
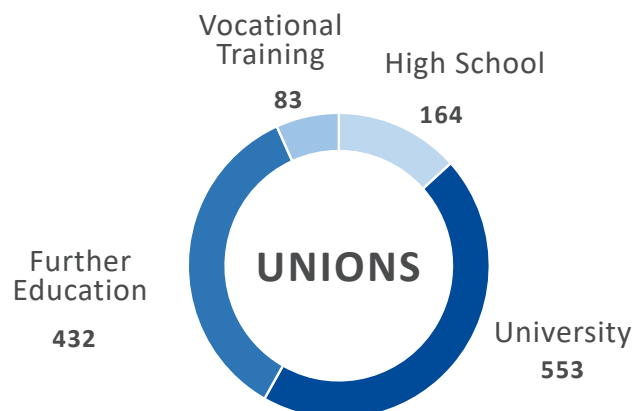
858'492 €

SCHOLARSHIP  
GRANTS AWARDED  
BY UNIONS &  
SINGLES CLUBS

## AMOUNTS AWARDED 2020-2021



## SCHOLARSHIPS GRANTEES AWARDED





# STEAL FROM US!

A more streamlined approach on European level and sharing our way of working with clubs and members to ensure better and more consistent communication for the whole organisation. This is what was cooking in the Communications kitchen in 2020-21.

First things first: we set ourselves a **goal**. We wanted to better connect members and attract new ones, so we can continue to give women a powerful voice. Internally, we wanted to inform members about what we do, to inspire and engage, to connect and have fun. Externally, our ambition was to be more outgoing to stand out and enhance visibility and awareness.

Second, we made it clear **whom** we wanted to reach out to. We felt it important to go beyond presidents and board members, and try to connect with all members. Externally, we choose to focus on millennial women.

And then we kicked off! For the first time we invited all members to join us for **online events**: joyful get-togethers for Christmas and Easter, informative webinars on different topics and we ended with our **September Celebration**. A festive gathering to celebrate our common achievements. We discussed

the importance of programme, education, leadership, mentoring and advocacy, we handed out our different awards, and we set the spotlight on the 100 year anniversary of Soroptimist International.

Our **newsletter THE LINK** got a refreshed look and feel, improved copy, a bigger variety of topics and we sent it to all members whose mail addresses we had. The content now also serves to update the website and social media with little extra effort.

That helped to increase our reach on **social media**. We defined a purpose for each channel and introduced a planned approach with sponsored posts and specific hashtags. Resulting in +20% likes and followers on

Facebook, +120% followers on Instagram and +32% followers and profile visits on Twitter.

We organised **Communication Master Classes** for all members to help spread knowledge and create more consistency in what and how we communicate as an organisation. Our adagio was and is: **steal from us!** Reuse and share what we do on a European level in your club, so that together we remain a strong voice for women!







# SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL of Europe

Soroptimists are women in professions and business who work together at local, national and international levels to educate, empower and enable women and girls with an aim to improving their lives. We are a strong international network of over 70'000 women, who are powerful and effective advocates of women's and girls' rights.

If you want to help us make a difference for girls and women in your community and beyond, if you would like to extend your network, we invite you to find out more about us!

[www.soroptimisteurope.org](http://www.soroptimisteurope.org)



WE STAND  UP  
FOR **WOMEN!**

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