



Soroptimist International Annual Report 2023



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About Soroptimist International

Founded in 1921, Soroptimist International is a global membership organisation striving to achieve gender equality for women and girls, and human rights for all. Soroptimist International (SI) is tasked with representing Soroptimists at the global level by advocating for the adoption and implementation of policies of all Member States of the United Nations, where SI has permanent representation at seven duty stations. In 2021 Soroptimist International Foundation was established as a Charitable Trust enabling SI to maximise opportunities for its international projects. SI (Soroptimist International) Limited is the sole Trustee of the Foundation.

The Foundation now encompasses former President Appeals in addition to other work. Every four years SI holds an International Convention when we welcome Soroptimists from around the globe, re-engaging them with our global advocacy work and reuniting them with old friends and opportunities to make new connections.

SI operates under a Company registered in England and Wales with Companies House, called SI (Soroptimist International) Limited; Company Number 08670477. The Company has five members who are the five Soroptimist International Federations: Soroptimist International of the Americas, Soroptimist International Africa, Soroptimist International of Europe, Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland and Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific.

Approaching 65,000 Soroptimists, working to transform the lives of women, girls and communities in 118 countries, SI has held General Consultative Status since 1984 with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). SI's United Nations Representatives ensure that the voices of women and girls around the world are included in international decision-making and each are involved with numerous committees.

The International Head Office is based in Ely, Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom, with the five Soroptimist International Federations operating from Philadelphia, USA; Lagos, Nigeria; Geneva, Switzerland; Stockport, UK; and Sydney, Australia. The SI Board is formed of two Directors from each member Federation, together with the International President, International Treasurer and International Director of Advocacy, each appointed as a Director of the Company. SI has five working Committees covering Finance, Governance, Global Policy, Global Impact and Communications. Soroptimist International Foundation also has a dedicated Committee to oversee all its work.

VISION

Women and girls will achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide

MISSION

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

PRINCIPLES

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

Foreword

Maureen Maguire, SI President 2022-2023



It is a privilege to present this Annual Report that outlines the hard work and many achievements that have taken place at Soroptimist International during 2023, a year that presented many opportunities and challenges not only for the organisation but also for Soroptimists, personally and professionally. 2023, was a year that Soroptimists across the world reacted to assist and support those in need just as Soroptimists have done for the last 102 years.

I believe we can look forward to a future with optimism because of who we are and what we strive to do for gender equality, human rights, peace, and security for all people. We do not waiver from seeking to improve the lives of women and girls. We do this through our wonderful projects, our advocacy, and our determination to do whatever we can with dedication and kindness. Together we have impacted the lives of many women and girls who can now take their rightful place within their communities. Thank you for your donations and support that has been given to those in need.

The Soroptimist International Board continued to meet monthly and regularly monitored its Strategic Plan and objectives receiving reports from the Committee Chairs and reports on our advocacy work at the United Nations (UN), as well as having oversight of the governance of the organisation. In a year of financial turmoil with rising costs and falling membership affecting SI's income, we achieved almost a break-even position, having only a minor overspend of approximately GBP 2,700.

SI continued to submit written statements to the UN and our UN Representatives continued to attend and interceded on our behalf through oral presentations, whenever possible.

I was pleased to approve that Soroptimist International join the Global Coalition for Social Justice, which has and will open many doors for Soroptimist International, supporting our work as we move forward to the future.

My goal of bringing Soroptimist International and the five Federations working together continued in 2023, with a number of joint events and webinars which showcased the work that was ongoing within Clubs, Regions, Unions and Countries. Working together has resulted in another major initiative which started in 2023, that of a Data Sub-Group where the Federations and the UN Representatives came together to discuss how better to obtain data on the grassroots projects carried out by Clubs.

During the year, I also established the SI Youth Forum. This Forum will ensure that Soroptimist International hears and listens to the voices of our younger members. Why not support them by becoming a mentor?

2023 was a year of celebration. I was very proud and privileged to welcome almost 1,700 Soroptimists and their friends and families to Dublin, Ireland, the island where I live, where Immediate Past SI President Sharon and I hosted the International Convention. It was wonderful to see everyone, to hear about the work that has and is going on through our UN Representatives, to learn about the work in our Federations and to listen to inspiring speakers, whilst also having time for friendship and fun. Thank you to the SI 2023 Convention Committee for making it happen!

Foreword continued

The SI 2023 Dublin Convention was the location that the SI Board chose for the launch of the Soroptimist International new Emblem. It is important that there is one brand of recognition for our organisation and for all Soroptimists who wish to claim that they are part of an international organisation, who claim they are a Global Voice for Women and who want world recognition as a Global Soroptimist. Our brand ensures that we are consistent, easily recognisable, and that we continue to create an impact in today's world.

The Dublin Convention was also the location for the launch of The Soroptimist International Foundation, the new "home" for our International Projects, and I was very privileged to have been able to visit three of these during my travels. Soroptimist International recognises that education is one of the most effective strategies to empower women and girls and dramatically reduce gender inequality. It is a basic human right that should be safe, of high quality, and accessible to all. Why? Because educating women and girls produces better health outcomes, fuels economic growth, and ensures stable and peaceful societies.

Education, empowerment, and enablement are the focus for the projects within the Soroptimist International Foundation. So, you can imagine that the highlight of all highlights during 2023, was seeing the difference that your donations to the Soroptimist International Foundation - Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal has made to the lives of over 3,000 women and girls. Visiting these education and training projects in Cambodia, Uganda and Trinidad and Tobago, and at the same time meeting members, and listening to the work that you do within your Clubs, Regions, Unions and Countries demonstrated your commitment to our Mission and Vision to educating, empowering and enabling women and girls. Thank you for the work that you do, for your hospitality, and for making me feel so welcome during my visits.

SI Headquarters staff continued to provide an excellent service to the Board, and all associated with the organisation and in 2023, we had a full complement of staff, ably led by the SI Global Executive Director (GED) Deborah Thomas. On your behalf, I would like to say thank you to the staff for their dedication and commitment to Soroptimist International.

I wish to pay tribute to the 2023 SI Board of Directors, Procedural Consultant, UN Representatives, the Advocacy Advisors, Position Holders, and everyone who works for and at Soroptimist International and journeyed with me during 2023; they made my role possible. In the words of Maya Angelou - "Every Journey begins with a single step". I thank them for taking the step with me.

Finally, I want to congratulate all Soroptimists. You have accomplished so much in the last year, and you should be proud of your achievements. I invite you all to reflect on your successes. Your passion, time, wonderful ideas and generous donations to the Soroptimist International Foundation have been instrumental in Soroptimist International's success, and I am confident that with your continued commitment, we will achieve even greater things in the future.



Photo: SI President Maureen Maguire addressing the SI Convention 2023 in Dublin

Finance



**Kathy King, SI Treasurer 2020-2023 and
Wendy Logan, SI Treasurer 2024-2025**

The 2023 financial year for SI (Soroptimist International) Limited resulted in a very small loss. This was due to a surplus of GBP 18,182 from the Dublin Convention and the salary budget being underspent due to vacancies.

It was pleasing that the reserves that were allocated to balance the 2023 budget were not required. In 2023 we placed our bank reserves, that were not needed for immediate cashflow, into a Certificate of Deposit in order to gain more interest on those funds.

The Finance Committee met monthly to review financial performance, investments and discuss matters of policy and process. During the year the Finance Manual was reviewed with the amendments being subsequently approved by the Board including an amendment to the date that the Federation dues are required to be paid to 30 November so that all dues are received before the end of SI's financial year.

Supporting the Soroptimist International Foundation Committee to continue to implement the required policies and reporting requirements of a Charity was a major focus during the year. This included assisting the GED with the Annual UK Charities Return and establishing a Certificate of Deposit for the Elynor Falk Legacy funds.

The SI Investment Portfolio at the end of the financial year showed only a slight improvement due to the worldwide economic situation. Investments were closely monitored with the Investment Manager attending Finance Committee meetings on a quarterly basis to discuss the performance of our Investment Portfolio. The Board receives quarterly updates on investments and management accounts.

The members of the Finance Committee during the year were Connie Mutunhu (Chair), Maureen Maguire, Kathy King, Deborah Thomas, Wendy Logan, Hafdis Karlsdóttir until October and Siew Yong Gnanalingam from July.

The many hours of work that the members of the Finance Committee contributed during the year are acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Financial Statements

The SI (Soroptimist International) Limited Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2023 show a small deficit of GBP 2,677. This result was mainly due to savings on salaries and the surplus received from the Dublin Convention. This amount also includes the end of the year tax liability of GBP 1,892.

Total income from Dues of GBP 5.20 per member for half of the year and GBP 5.30 for the remainder of the year was GBP 338,825 compared to GBP 341,344 for the previous year. The income from dues has again reduced due to falling membership across the Federations.

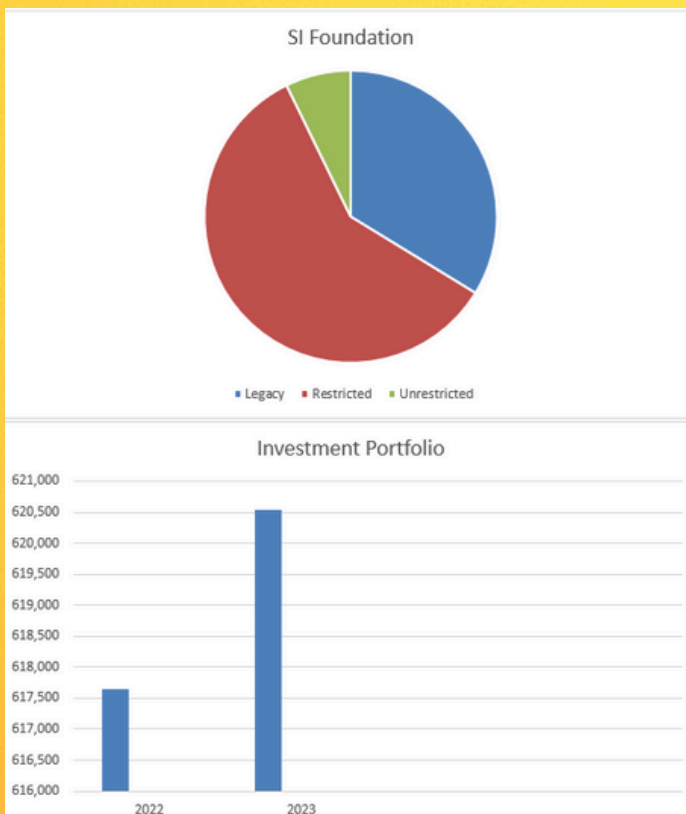
Financial Statements of the Soroptimist International Foundation

The Financial Statements of the Soroptimist International Foundation reported total Charity funds of GBP 273,169 at 31 December 2023. These funds were made up of Endowment Funds of GBP 92,193 (Elynor Falk Legacy), Restricted Funds of GBP 161,241 and Unrestricted Funds of GBP 19,735. Donations of GBP 185,763 were received and grants to Foundation projects totalled GBP 154,076.

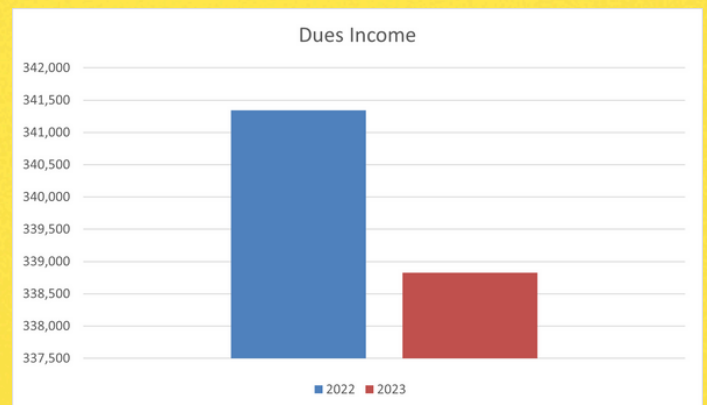
Investment Portfolio

The net total value of the managed investment portfolio at 31 December 2023 was GBP 620,532, an increase of GBP 2,884 from the total value in 2022 of GBP 617,648. This balance continues to be much lower than the amount of the initial investment due to the worldwide economic situation of high inflation, rising interest rates, and political conflict.

Soroptimist International Foundation



SI (Soroptimist International) Limited



Dublin Convention

The Soroptimist International Convention 2023 in Dublin was a monumental gathering of individuals committed to making a positive change in the world. From 27 to 29 July, hundreds of Soroptimists from across the globe converged in the vibrant Irish capital to share ideas, inspire change and celebrate their collective efforts. The theme of the Convention was 'Challenge the Future', bringing together speakers from across the world. The Convention Programme consisted of seminars, workshops, round table discussions and poster sessions. In addition, there were plenty of opportunities to meet old friends and create new friendships and connections, with an exciting social programme including a Friendship Evening, a Convention Dinner and a chance to explore the city's many cultural highlights. There was also an opportunity to explore the historical city of Dublin and beyond during guided tours. A huge thank you must go to the SI 2023 Dublin Convention Committee, who "made it happen".

Keynote speakers

We had the opportunity to hear inspirational talks from our keynote speakers. On Thursday 27 July, our keynote speeches for the Soroptimist International Convention Dublin began with a talk on female leadership by the first woman President of Ireland, Mary Robinson. Mary was a principled and transformative leader who fought for equality and women's rights throughout her time in office. Following her Presidency, she was appointed as the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, where she held office from 1997 to 2002. She is a founding member of The Elders and was appointed Chair in November 2018 following the death of Kofi Annan. Mary encourages us to use our voice and to realise our own power as change-makers, and as female leaders in our own communities. Each of us has a moral responsibility to step up and lead for change. We must step outside our comfort zones and empower one another to do so.

In the afternoon of Thursday 27 July, our second keynote speaker, Suba Umathevan, took to the stage. The current CEO of the DROSOS Foundation delivered a captivating keynote speech at the Soroptimist International Dublin Convention 2023. Suba's talk shed light on her remarkable journey, from leaving Sri Lanka as a refugee in the 1980s, to becoming a champion of women's rights and a leader within the non-profit sector.

**Maureen Maguire, SI President 2022-2023 and
Martyna Wykrota, Executive Assistant**



Photo: Delegates in the auditorium



*Photo: Mary Robinson, former President
of the Republic of Ireland*

Dublin Convention continued

Suba stressed the importance of productive and positive partnerships at all levels when approaching projects, challenges and interventions. Specifically, ensuring that people who are relevant to the conversations, at the local and grassroots level as much as government and non-profit officials, to most effectively advocate for others; in raising this, Suba praised the actions of Soroptimist International in acting as a voice for the voiceless in projects around the world.

Our first keynote speech on day two (28 July) of the Soroptimist International Convention 2023, came from Jim Gamble, CEO of INEQ Safeguarding Group and an expert in child protection. The premise of his talk emphasised why the dangers regarding online safety and the safeguarding of children online are not about the technology per se, but instead the people that use the technology. Jim argued that the internet, at large, has been and continues to be, a force for good, as it is a mechanism to educate, empower, and enable one another. It is a way in which we can create content, and this content is made by people. Sadly, where we have opportunities to create positive content, we also have opportunities to create content which harms others directly or indirectly.

Delegates were informed that children and young people are targets of online abuse and exploitation. They may turn to social media to search for friends and connections and get addicted to gaining likes and online approval. This makes them emotionally and physically vulnerable to online predators and abusers. Jim advises that parents and carers speak openly with their children and educate them about the dangers of having an online presence. Preventative measures such as regular emotional check ins are essential to ensure young people's safety.

Our second keynote speech on the day, came from Nicole Ameline, former member of the National Assembly of France and distinguished member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Nicole emphasised the need for increased representation of women in politics to bring more attention to women's social and economic issues. Only 25 per cent of the world's parliamentary bodies are women, meaning that we are severely under-represented and often excluded from decisions which impact women both nationally and internationally. With more women in politics, we will be able to create policies which challenge existing issues and create parity.



Photo: Suba Umathevan



Photo: Jim Gamble



Photo: Nicole Ameline

Dublin Convention continued

Next, attendees at the SI Dublin Convention 2023 witnessed an engaging presentation by Felisa Tibbitts, a prominent figure in the field of human rights and education. With an emphasis on transformative education's role in tackling climate change and fostering global citizenship, Felisa outlined a vision for empowering individuals to catalyse a sustainable future. Felisa, a leading researcher based at Utrecht University, shed light on the pressing need for education to address climate change, considering it as a vital tool in steering societies towards a sustainable path.

She delved into her research encompassing curriculum development, pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and higher education transformation, emphasising their significance in fostering awareness and action on climate-related challenges. Felisa urged an inclusive approach, soliciting insights and preferences from youth themselves. She emphasised the importance of supporting Education for Sustainable Development within and beyond schools, listening to the voices of the youth, enabling them to lead, and adopting sustainable lifestyles collectively.

Dr. Sean Wensley is a Senior Veterinarian for Animal Welfare and Professional Engagement at the UK veterinary charity, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA). He is also a former President of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) – where its first ever female President, Dr. Mary Brancker CBE, was herself a Soroptimist! He illustrated how animal welfare is linked to the SDGs, for example, zero hunger, climate action, peace and justice, and health and well-being. Progress is being made at the UN, where animal welfare is now recognised as an issue.

Dr. Renata Dwan is a policy expert and former UN official who has worked on peace and conflict issues in some of the world's most complex crises. She currently works as a Senior Consulting Fellow of Chatham House and is also a Senior Advisor to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva, Switzerland. Renata's speech focused on women in conflict, she argued that when we talk about violence inflicted on women, we must not forget about the secondary receivers of this violence, including children, adolescents, and often the community at large.



Photo: Felisa Tibbitts



Photo: Dr. Sean Wensley



Photo: Dr. Renata Dwan

Dublin Convention continued

Launch of new emblem and branding

We launched our new emblem which was warmly received. As an organisation, we have undergone a transformative rebranding, one that acknowledges and respects our rich history while embracing a forward-looking perspective enriched with contemporary elements.

This revitalised identity encapsulates the essence of inclusivity and celebrates the mosaic of cultures that define our global sisterhood. By preserving the integrity of the past while infusing modernity into our brand, we honour the tireless dedication of women who have paved the way for progress.

Our emblem, steeped in tradition, now resonates with a sense of unity across generations. Embracing ethnic diversity, we proudly represent the kaleidoscope of experiences and voices within our organisation. Soroptimist International has not only evolved; it has emerged as a symbol of empowerment, unity, and hope for women across the world as we march together into a bright and inclusive future.

Poster exhibition

For the first time at a Soroptimist International Convention a poster display took place. The aim of the posters was to showcase the impact of programmes, projects and initiatives from all five Federations. Many Clubs, Unions, Regions and Countries all contributed posters which addressed one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was a fun opportunity to learn about our global impact and to gain inspiration and guidance for similar projects.



Dublin Convention continued

Our Voice at the United Nations

On Saturday 29 July, at the SI Dublin Convention 2023, we heard in depth from our UN Representatives, about their experiences, practice and involvement across the seven UN centres at which SI is present. This talk offered a quick tour of these seven centres and our UN Representatives' roles within them, while also highlighting the key challenges of operating in such a space and what Soroptimist members can do at the local Club level to enhance our voice at the UN.

Opening the session, our Global Policy Advisor, Hana Smith, provided an insightful overview of SI's activities at UN Headquarters (UNHQ) in New York on behalf of our Main Representative at this centre, Bette Levy. As a prominent hub for global activities and home to multiple key UN centres, commissions and associated organisations, New York hosts the greatest number of SI Representatives at one centre, with Bette Levy, Frances Zainoeddin, Jackie Shapiro, María Fornella-Oehninger and Vanesa Treers all working in collaboration with one another to ensure the voice of women and girls is heard.

During this speech, some of the key issues present in UNHQ conversations were highlighted, including the rollback of women's rights in recent years, but particularly following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A notable lack of political will among Member States was also raised, specifically concerning the push to achieve the SDGs in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thirdly, the lack of options for hybrid participation at the UN centre in New York was raised, as this presents restrictions on the capacity for representatives from all organisations and civil society to participate at the highest level.

Discussing the nature of SI's activities at the UN in Geneva, the second largest UN centre and host to over 7900 meetings a year, SI UN Representative Berthe De Vos-Neven provided a breakdown of the specific teams and committees of which our representatives here are part of.

These teams and committees include the Human Rights Council, an important intergovernmental body that oversees the defence and respect of human rights, ensuring that everyone shares and enjoys the same rights and freedoms to the fullest. The Universal Periodic Review was also among these committees, operating as a controlling system where members are reviewed on what they do to respect and employ human rights in their countries.

Berthe stressed the importance of data from projects at Club level for their work in Geneva. Gathering this information so that our representatives can contribute to UN reports is vital to help our Representatives work together to make the world a better place for women and to showcase Soroptimist International's global impact.

Photo: UN Representatives together at the SI Convention 2023, in Dublin

From left to right:

*Marion Prechtl (Vienna), Berthe De Vos-Neven (Geneva),
Evelyne Para and Marie-Christine Gries (both Paris),
Donatella Benjamin (Geneva) and Betty Oluoch (Nairobi)*



Dublin Convention continued

The main institution at the UN in Vienna is the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for which Marion Precht explained the action, impact and associations that the work undertaken at this centre has for the mission of SI. In particular, key committees and commissions situated in Vienna, where our Representatives are able to make a substantial impact, include the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND).

Through its day-to-day operations and key events, UNODC covers a broad range of issues under the topic of drugs and crime, addressing criminal acts which affect women and girls, such as trafficking, substance abuse, domestic violence, environmental mistreatment and many others. Special conferences also take place throughout the year on relevant and current issues, such as the presence of corruption, as well as how to use data to combat corruption in different contexts.

Speaking on behalf of our SI UN Representatives in Nairobi, Mary Muia and Betty Oluoch, SI Global Policy Advisor, Hana Smith, provided insight into the work of SI undertaken at the UN offices in Nairobi, which is home to the UN Environment Programme.

This Centre focuses on key environmental issues and related topics, whilst offering a space for SI to collaborate with other stakeholder groups for action toward social, environmental, and economic empowerment and justice.

The umbrella topic of environment is broad and the issues addressed under it are equally so, with the regular consideration of relevant issues, including: the changing climate and its threat to the environment, peoples, and biodiversity, habitat destruction and the exploitation of resources, as well as the impact that this has on the lives of women and girls who require these resources and spaces to thrive. Additional topics considered here involve pollution and waste, such as that which relates to the water, land, and air in equal measure, as well as resource depletion – including unsustainable business practices which exacerbate social and economic inequalities.

*Photo, from left to right:
SI UN Representatives
Marie-Christine Gries and
Evelyne Para (both Paris),
Donatella Benjamin and
Berthe De Vos-Neven (both
Geneva), and SI Global
Policy Advisor Hana Smith*



Dublin Convention continued



Photo: Delegates enjoying the Convention

Our team of UN Representatives in Paris consists of Evelyne Para, Marie-Christine Gries and Rina Dupriet, who participate throughout the year at various commissions, national days, forums and committees at the UN Education Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO). From the Paris team, Evelyne Para spoke on the important work our representatives undertake at this UN centre and the challenges which lie ahead.

Evelyne argued that there have been real advances made in the past 25 years, particularly concerning the participation of women and girls in higher education, which has tripled in the years following the introduction of new technologies for learning. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of girls are improving at a faster rate than those of boys – nevertheless, many global challenges lie ahead.

For our SI UN Representative, Liliana Mosca, at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome, a summary of our representatives' activities and involvement at this UN centre was provided by Donatella Benjamin of the UN Geneva team. The FAO is a specialised agency of the UN that leads international efforts to eliminate hunger – in particular, their goal is to achieve food security for all and to ensure that all people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active and healthy lives. SI made our first application to the FAO in 1988, after which we became a silent observer in 1999, before taking on a representative role at this centre.

Soroptimist International has two major goals at this UN centre. The first goal is to achieve consultative status at the FAO, which is different to what we have already achieved at other UN centres. Secondly, is SI's participation at the biannual FAO regional conferences, which are held every two years in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa. These conferences, where Member States establish priorities for the FAO's work in each region, providing scope for stronger partnerships between SI and other organisations that share our mission and goals.

The final UN centre to be addressed during this session was the UN Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, where SI Representative Dr. Theresa Devasahayam works to raise our organisation's profile in the international society. Speaking on behalf of Theresa at the Dublin Convention, Marie-Christine Gries provided a summary of the key activities and challenges involved in being a representative at the UN in Bangkok.

Our contribution to meetings at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (ESCAP) is significant due to our work undertaken at the grassroots level. However, one specific challenge at this centre has been managing the link between our club projects at the local level and the SDGs. It is important that we endeavour to serve the local communities that our projects impact and ensure that our projects are more explicitly aligned with the SDGs. In this way, SI operates as a bridge between local communities and the international community.

Dublin Convention continued

Workshops

The SI Dublin Convention 2023 saw a dynamic exchange of ideas and expertise, with our Federation Workshops taking centre stage. Each workshop contributed a distinct and enthusiastic dimension to the event.

SIAF Federation Workshop: Good Health and Wellbeing

The SI Dublin Convention witnessed a compelling workshop on the urgent need to combat cervical cancer across the African continent. Speakers included Jalila Moufquia, SIAF President 2023-2024; Connie Mutunhu, SI Director and Linda Merieau. This workshop shed light on the landscape of women's health throughout Africa, particularly concerning cervical cancer and its preventable nature. The workshop also unveiled the Health4Life Fund, a ground-breaking initiative aimed at tackling non-communicable diseases, particularly cervical cancer, across Africa.

SIGBI Federation Workshop: Life on Land

The SIGBI workshop covered several projects across the Soroptimist International Federation of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) and under the title of 'Life on Land'. The projects included within 'Life on Land' have sought to emphasise efforts toward halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

Throughout this workshop, Soroptimists heard from several different presenters, including Lindsay Green, SIGBI Programme Director, who facilitated the workshop, as well as speakers and slides from SI Kolkata, SI Chaguanas and SI Malta. Importantly, this workshop served to showcase local and contextually appropriate means of reversing biodiversity loss, providing examples for Soroptimists in attendance to feedback to their own clubs and efforts around the world.



Photo: Delegates attending a Convention workshop

Dublin Convention continued

Workshops continued

SIE Federation Workshop: Gender Equality – Unveiling Pathways to Progress

The workshop 'Gender Equality: Unveiling Pathways to Progress', featured a panel of experts committed to combating gender inequality and analysing the concerning pushback on women's rights. Reka Safrany, Presiden of the European Women's Lobby (EWL); Dr. Salome Mbugua, CEO of AkiDwA; and Carolien Demey, President of Soroptimist International Europe (SIE), led the engaging session.

The core objective of the SIE workshop was to delve into strategies for addressing the persistent gaps between men and women and to openly discuss the troubling resurgence of opposition against women's rights, with emphasis on the pressing need to confront the challenges facing women across Europe and other regions.

SIA Federation Workshop: Quality Education

The Soroptimist International Dublin Convention saw yet another illuminating workshop take the stage, as Stephanie Smith, President of Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA), captivated attendees with insights into the organisation's enduring commitment to women's education and empowerment. The workshop on quality education shed light on SIA's pioneering initiatives that uplift women and girls by providing them access to education and training, paving the way for economic empowerment.

For Soroptimist International of the Americas, the pursuit of its mission to empower women and girls through education has remained steadfast. The organisation's commitment is channelled through two signature Dream Programs that have been making waves: the Live Your Dream Award and Dream It Be It: Career Support for Girls. President Stephanie emphasised that SIA's Dream Programs extend beyond education access; they serve as preventative measures against circumstances that perpetuate gender-based violence. By tackling the root causes and fostering empowerment from an early age, SIA is creating a ripple effect that ultimately aspires to pave the way for a more equitable world.



Photo: Ancestry workshop run by EPIC, The Irish Emigration Museum

Dublin Convention continued

Workshops continued

SISEAP Workshop: Climate Action

Soroptimist International of South East Asia Pacific Federation (SISEAP) addressed climate change – exploring the connection between risk profiles, vulnerability, and the importance of empowering women in global climate action.

This workshop shed light on the profound impact of empowering women in global climate action. Women play a vital role in mitigating the impact of climate change, particularly when they are involved in decision-making processes.

By promoting gender equality and addressing the unique challenges faced by women, climate action becomes more effective and sustainable, leading to a more resilient and equitable world for all. As Soroptimists continue to embrace their role as change-makers, they can drive climate action and contribute to a safe, healthy, and sustainable future for generations to come.



Photo: Dr. Donnell Davis speaking at the SISEAP workshop on climate change

Dublin Convention continued

Conclusion

To conclude, the Soroptimist International 2023 Dublin Convention was an opportunity to learn, socialise, and think of innovative ways to further educate, empower and enable women and girls globally. We look forward to our next SI Convention, which will be hosted by Soroptimist International of the Americas in 2027.



Global Policy

**Maureen Maguire, SI President 2022-2023,
Hana Smith, SI Global Policy Advisor**

SI is dedicated to educating, empowering and enabling women and girls to realise their individual and collective potential.

Since 1984, SI has held General Consultative Status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Currently, only 138 organisations out of 6,494 organisations with representation at the UN, hold the same status. Importantly, only 13 of these organisations focus specifically on advancing the human rights of all women and girls, including SI.

SI's voice at the UN has never been so critical. With the rollback of women's and girls' rights around the world, our team of volunteer Representatives continue to dedicate themselves to ensure that SI truly is a Global Voice for Women.

SI has a global team of volunteer Representatives to the UN, which grew from 19 to 24 at the end of 2023. Among our 24 UN Representatives, two are designated Youth Representatives – one in New York, and one in Nairobi.

SI's Representatives work across seven UN duty stations, to advance the rights of all women and girls across thematic areas, with specific focus on working to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4, on Quality Education, and SDG 5, on Gender Equality.



Global Policy continued



SI UN Representative Centres

New York

New York is home to the Headquarters of the UN, and in 2023, SI's team comprised Bette Levy, Frances Zainoeddin, María Fornella-Oehninger, Jackie Shapiro and Vanesa Treers.

Bette Levy is the team's focal point. In 2023, SI was appointed the role of Global Organising Partner for the Women's Major Group (WMG) at the UN. Bette worked tirelessly to facilitate participation in global policy among all members of the WMG. In addition to this role, Bette remained active in other coalitions working on language and advocacy task groups to push back against regressive language on gender equality.

María participated in the 61st Session of the UN Commission on Social Development (CSocD) by planning events, drafting a written statement, and she was an active member of the Advocacy and Education Sub-Committees of the NGO CSocD Committee. María delivered a statement at a WMG event in September on a rights-centred gender-transformative economy and was a speaker at various events throughout the year.

Jackie served her role as the Treasurer of the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking which works to develop awareness and disseminate best practices of bankrupting the business of human trafficking and encouraging the development and use of data to determine programmes and policies.

Jackie and María also participated in the Open-Ended Working Group to End Homelessness, which was successful in advocating with Member States to expand issues of human rights of homeless persons. Due to the efforts of this Group, the UN Secretary-General is now mandated to report on the progress and challenges on commitments to address homelessness, every two years.

Frances' work at the UN focuses on the rights of older women and issues that call for and have implications for empowering women and girls. She served as the Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing in New York until the end of her term in August 2023. Frances is dedicated to one day accomplishing the establishment of a Convention to Protect the Rights of Older Persons via this Committee.

The team was also involved in the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the High-Level Political Forum, the SDG Summit, and the preparations for the Summit of the Future which will be held in September 2024. Another notable moment was the UN Water Conference which was held in March 2023 – the first time in 47 years.

Vanesa Treers worked closely with the NGO CSW Committee in New York before stepping down as SI UN Representative in September 2023. To address the gap and expand the team, SI appointed three new Representatives to the New York team in December 2023, one of whom is a Youth Representative.

Global Policy continued

Geneva

The UN in Geneva can be considered the organisation's 'second' Headquarters and the 'Capital of Peace'. It is home to the UN's human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, CEDAW Committee (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which SI's Representatives in Geneva follow.

SI's Representatives in Geneva are members of NGO CSW Geneva, a Committee that works on the UN Commission on the Status of Women and liaises with UN Women.

Berthe De Vos-Neven was the focal point of SI's team in Geneva. She was Vice President of NGO CSW Geneva; she also followed the CEDAW Committee and delivered an intervention during the 86th Session in October 2023.

Donatella Benjamin was a member of the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva, participating in a range of events including on the health of older persons and the impacts of climate change on older women. She also attended many Sessions of the Human Rights Council with Berthe, who submitted reports on the progress or failures of specific countries under review.

Stacy Ciulik attended several sessions of the Human Rights Council and travelled across Switzerland to educate Soroptimist Clubs about SI's global policy work at the UN.

Berthe De Vos-Neven, Main Representative to the UN in Geneva says:

"We are making major progress in establishing Soroptimist International as a professional NGO on topics of women's rights, being acknowledged as an appreciated and valued member."

Photo: SI UN Representative team in Geneva, with 2023 SI President Maureen Maguire at a NGO CSW Geneva event on the International Day of Peace, celebrated every year on 21 September

From left to right:
Berthe De Vos-Neven, Donatella Benjamin, SI President Maureen Maguire, Stacy Ciulik



Global Policy continued

Vienna

SI has a team of four UN Representatives in Vienna who are actively engaged in the work of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In 2023, they submitted a written statement on women and girl's access to justice.

Members of the team served in leadership positions throughout 2023, including Marion Prechtl as Treasurer of the Committee on Sustainable Development, Christine Peer as Vice-Chair of NGO CSW Vienna, and Dr. Martina Gredler completed her second term as Second Vice President of CoNGO (Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations), which celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023. Marcella Sigmund returned as a Representative in the Vienna team and has become involved in the Committee on Ageing.

Marion Prechtl, Main Representative to the UN in Vienna says:

"It is important for us to deal with the key issues at the UN in Vienna in the spirit of Soroptimist International and to raise our voices for all women and girls. The focus in Vienna is on drugs and crime in all its forms, including violence against women, terrorism, human trafficking, illegal migration, illegal arms trafficking, crimes against the environment and more. We must continue to draw attention to the extent to which women and girls are affected and the impact these issues have on their lives."



Photo of SI Vienna UN Representative team

From left to right:
Christine Peer, Marion Prechtl,
Marcella Sigmund, and Dr. Martina
Gredler

Global Policy continued

Nairobi

The Nairobi team of UN Representatives comprised Mary Muia and Betty Oluoch in 2023. With the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) stationed in Nairobi, the focus of SI's team here is on the environment, climate change, disaster risk management, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

The Women's Major Group in Nairobi, on which SI's UN Representatives sit, stressed the importance of ensuring diverse perspectives across all environmental policy. They called for a globally harmonised mechanism for tracking toxic chemicals in plastics and urged Member States to prioritise health and human rights, advocating for a Treaty covering the entire life cycle of plastics.

In December 2023, SI appointed three new Representatives to the team, one of whom is a Youth Representative, to expand SI's presence moving forward into 2024.

Mary Muia, Main Representative to the UN in Nairobi says:

"My interest subject is how global legislation on the environment and food security impacts women and girls. It is an honour to volunteer at this high-level role to contribute to the empowerment of women and girls globally on behalf of SI."

Paris

Evelyne Para, Marie-Christine Gries and Rina Dupriet are SI's three representatives at UNESCO in Paris. Throughout 2023, the team participated in several conferences and events focusing on education, technology, science and culture. In November, UNESCO adopted a new Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development.

This Recommendation is unique as it considers all aspects of education and its intersection with digital technology, climate change, gender equality, and fundamental human rights.

In December, UNESCO held the 42nd Session of its General Conference – an annual conference where all Member States come together to discuss the means of achieving universal education, the challenges of new technologies, and how to address the severe impacts of the climate crisis.



*Photo: SI's UN Representative team in Paris, attending the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference
From left to right:
Marie-Christine Gries, Evelyne Para and Rina Dupriet*

Global Policy continued

Rome

SI's Representative to the UN in Rome, Liliana Mosca, attended various meetings at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) throughout 2023. However, since the beginning of the year, the UN centre in Rome has been in an unstable situation and civil society organisations like SI are limited in their access to meetings. Despite this, Liliana attended several meetings of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' organisations (CSIPM), which works to eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition.



Photo: Liliana Mosca holds the FAO flag at its Headquarters in Rome

Bangkok

Dr. Theresa Devasahayam, SI's Representative to the UN in Bangkok, attended the 79th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The 2023 theme was "Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development".

During the session, UN Member States recognised the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a blueprint to drive the necessary transformation in Asia and the Pacific in response to the Region's main challenges, including food insecurity, energy and finance, and acknowledged the importance of boosting partnerships that strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation and scaling up ambition to achieve the SDGs. Theresa attended other events focusing on decent work, the environment, and social and economic development.

During 2023, Soroptimist International:

- Had a team of 19 UN Representatives
- Had 7 Representatives in leadership roles
- Was active in 7 duty stations
- Participated in 20+ Commissions and Annual/Regional meetings
- Delivered 17 statements
- Signed 28 written statements

Global Policy continued

Advocacy Advisors

Each SI President appoints SI Advocacy Advisors who support on specific work to advance SI's global profile in various ways. In 2023, SI President Maureen Maguire appointed three Advocacy Advisors: Bev Bucur, Pat Black, and Linda Witong.

Bev Bucur

Bev Bucur represents Soroptimist International on Women for Water Partnership (WfWP). SI works together with WfWP to create awareness that clean water is a limited resource, and that safe drinking water and sanitation are essential to good health. SI continues to advocate for the need to include women in all levels of water management. During the autumn of 2022, Bev joined former SI President and President of Women for Water Partnership, Mariet Verhoef-Cohen in New York to plan for the 2023 Water Forum. Bev delivered a statement at the Forum calling on UN Member States to take urgent action to include women in leadership positions across the water sector.

Bev also continues to support Soroptimist International more broadly via its Headquarters, by sharing her wealth of knowledge with staff members. Bev also participates on the SI Global Policy and Global Impact Committees.



Photo: Bev Bucur

Pat Black

Continuing and expanding the work on a new platform for SI at international level, Pat Black was re-appointed as a W7 Gender Equality Advisor for the Group of 7 (G7) Japan Presidency in January 2023. The G7 was led in 2023 by the Japanese Prime Minister and the W7 2023 was headed by a consortium of Japanese NGOs supported by some of the NGO leaders for Women 7 (W7) 2022 from Germany.

Through Pat, SI was able to contribute text to the W7 Communiqué, which included recommendations to prevent gender-based violence. The W7 Communiqué was presented to the Japanese President at the W7 Summit in May 2023, ahead of the G7 Summit of Leaders in June.

NGOs in all the G7 countries, including SI, will continue to monitor and comment on whether these high-profile countries act on the recommendations W7 presented, to improve the lives of all women and girls.

With her experience, Pat was also able to mentor Soroptimists from the Italian Union during 2023 so that they could participate and take NGO leadership roles for the G7 Summit 2024 which will be headed by the Italian Prime Minister.



Photo: Pat Black

Global Policy continued

Advocacy Advisors continued

Linda Witong

Linda Witong volunteers an average of 6 to 8 hours a day preparing language and citations for various issues as they arise for SI. Since late March 2023, Linda gathered language on issues regarding poverty by year and topic in CSW outcome documents, UN reports and other relevant sources, adding citations for each one if needed during deliberations prior to or during CSW68 (2024).

Linda also prepared research for SI on other topics and virtually attended meetings being held in Vienna. She represents SI on the Board of the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Linda also took an active role in the Working Group on Gender-Based Violence as Torture Inflicted by Non-State Actors (NST) which issued a Working Paper on NST in December 2023.



Photo: Linda Witong

We are indebted to Bev, Pat and Linda for the support and help they contributed during 2023.

W7 – Women 7

Women 7 (W7) has been an official engagement group of the G7 Summit since 2018 and enables worldwide civil society organisations to come together to promote proposals on gender equality and women's rights to the governments within the G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 2023 W7 and G7 were hosted by Japan.

SI was once again pleased to support the application of Pat Black, SI Advocacy Advisor to become an active member of the W7 working groups. The 2023 W7 had 90 representatives from feminist organisations and they worked on five working groups that focused on women's empowerment, economic justice, abortion and gender identity, feminist foreign policy and financing gender equality.



Global Policy continued

Beyond our work at the United Nations, SI has expanded and strengthened its scope of Global Policy work, including through the establishment of the SI Youth Forum and Data Sub-Group.



SI Youth Forum

The SI Youth Forum is a community that was established in 2023 under SI President Maureen Maguire. The Forum was created for young Soroptimists (aged 40 years and under) to engage with each other at the international level by sharing ideas, advocating to fulfill the rights of all women and girls, and contributing, where possible, to SI's global policy and advocacy work more broadly to ensure a youth perspective is always present.

Upon its inception, the Forum was led by a group of six young Soroptimists from across all SI Federations, plus the support of the SI Global Policy Advisor and President Maureen Maguire. The Forum delivered its first webinar in October 2023, entitled 'Green Horizons', which discussed climate adaptation strategies being implemented by women.

SI-Data Sub Group

The SI-Data Sub Group was also established in 2023 as a mechanism to enable the SI UN Representatives to have easier access to data gathered from SI Club projects. The Group is considered a 'sub-group' of the Global Policy Committee and comprises of representation from each of the five SI Federations, the SI Global Policy Advisor, Director of Advocacy and the SI Chair of Global Policy, who chairs the group.

Global Impact



Leigh Ellwood Brown,
Director of Advocacy 2023-2024

Purpose

The Global Impact Committee's (GIC) purpose is to enhance the work of SI by providing a Global Voice for Women through collaboration with the five Federations. The GIC Members include representatives from all Federations who work together to develop, plan co-ordinate and promote Soroptimist International Impact campaigns that are aligned to the SI Vision, Mission and Objectives. Thus, this Committee acts as a conduit between SI and the Federations through sharing examples of good practice and project work that relate to the UN International Days, coordinating the activity for SI annual attendance at the Commission on the Status of Women in New York and agreeing the SI Campaign for the 16 Days of Activism to eliminate Violence against Women.

The Global Impact Committee met at least four times during 2023 and for the first time, included a second Representative from each Federation, who was under 40 years of age. These young members brought a richness and different perspective and voice to the meetings.

UN International Days

SI recognises that the UN International Days are days when it has an opportunity to educate Soroptimists on the various issues that affect women and girls and to celebrate the grassroots work that Clubs carry out across the World. Many Soroptimists organise activities and events.

President Maureen, in her goals for the 2022-2023 biennium, indicated that she wanted the five Federations and SI to mark specific days together to celebrate Awareness, Advocacy and Action as carried out by Soroptimists.

Outcomes of this joint working were:

Webinars:

- 24 January 2023
International Day of Education – 'Prioritising Education: Empowering Women and Girls'
- 5 June 2023
World Environment Day – 'Joining Forces to Beat Plastic Pollution'
- 28 October 2023
SI Youth Forum – 'Green Horizons'

Videos:

- 8 September 2023 – International Day of Literacy – sharing of Federation Projects
- 11 October – International Day of the Girl Child – sharing of Federation Projects

These may all be viewed at www.soroptimistinternational.org website.
Some of the presentations given are also available for viewing.

Global Impact continued

16 Days of Activism – Violence Against Women

Violence against women and girls remains the most widespread breach of human rights globally. 2023 was marked by escalating conflict and further shrinking of civic spaces, with the lives, bodies, dignity and freedom of women and girls under assault from threats and acts of violence.

The 16 Days of Activism which takes place every year from 24 November to 10 December was marked in 2023, by a number of events throughout the world such as buildings were illuminated by orange lighting, orange ribbons were tied to fences, and orange shoes were displayed in shop windows – all to draw attention to the meaning behind the 16 Days of Activism campaign. SI created a Trello board and used social media channels to raise awareness on the various forms of abuse that cause harm to women and girls.

67th Session of UN Commission on the Status of Women

The 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) was held 6 to 17 March 2023. The main focus was on innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age. The SI delegation of 65 Soroptimists gathered in New York to collectively engage at both the UN CSW67 and NGO CSW67 parallel meetings as an SI Global Voice for Women.

Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSW67 took place in a new hybrid model, that is a mixture of virtual and in-person meetings and events. Most of the side events hosted by Member States within the UN were in person, while the parallel events were a mixture of virtual and in-person.

To prepare the delegates for participation within CSW67, SI held a virtual training event on 8 February and produced and circulated an SI Advocacy Resource Pack to maximise Soroptimists attendance at the New York meetings.

A WhatsApp group was created for the members to communicate and also post interesting information and photos from the sessions attended. We held informal training in New York for the delegation on the process of the document that became the Agreed Conclusions from CSW67.

The CSW67 Themes for the Session in 2023 were:

- Priority theme: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls
- Review theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (Agreed Conclusions of the sixty-second session)



Global Impact continued

Under these themes SI hosted a number of parallel events. Here, SI showcased 'Best Practice Projects' selected from the five Federations and SI projects.

These presentations demonstrated how Soroptimists have successfully addressed the specific issues for women and girls, within their communities.

6 March 2023

'Achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment through Innovation, technology and education'

7 March 2023

'Opening Doors to Bright Future: Educating, Enabling and Empowering Enabling Rural Women'

10 March 2023

SI and Taiwan Coalition Against Violence (TCAV)

'Survivor Voices - Public-Private Partnerships to Support Victims of Stalking in the Digital Age'

14 March 2023

SI and Women for Water Partnership (WfWP)

'Technology, Water and Women'

15 March 2023

SI and Zonta International

'Leadership-Violence Against Women'

16 March 2023

SI and Global Alliance on the Rights of Older People

'Strengthening the Rights of Older People in Rural Areas'

Socially, SI delegates enjoyed meeting up with old friends and making new ones during their time at CSW67. All delegates were invited to join with the SI New York City Club's 100 Anniversary celebrations held on 7 March at the Cornell Club in Manhattan and the SI reception followed this event.



Photo: Soroptimists learning from Pat Black, SI Advocacy Advisor, about the CSW67 documents process that becomes the Agreed Conclusions at the outcome of the meeting. Held in the Vienna Café within the UN building

Global Impact continued



The Commonwealth

During 2023, the SI Representative to the Commonwealth, Pat Dale attended many meetings in London, both in-person and virtually where she had the opportunity to maximise SI's accreditation to the Commonwealth. In August 2023, President Maureen had the opportunity to attend the 13th Commonwealth's Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in Nassau, The Bahamas, under the theme 'Equality Toward a Common Future'.

Since the previous meeting in 2019 in Nairobi, and the impacts that COVID-19 had in the intervening year on climate change, economic turmoil, and many other crises, this event gave Ministers the opportunity to reflect on these and share the progress and initiatives from their countries that had been developed to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

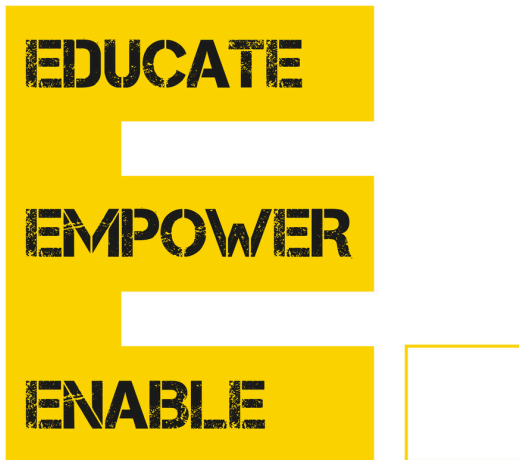


Every Woman Treaty

SI has been collaborating with Every Woman Treaty (EWT) since 2022 to develop a Treaty to End Violence Against Women, which both organisations believe could be a positive step in ending violence against women and girls. SI distributed an EWT message on a postcard to each Soroptimist attending the SI Convention in Dublin in July 2023, and all Soroptimists were encouraged to sign the EWT petition.

During the latter part of 2023, SI and EWT were concerned about the pushback to women's rights globally, and the difficulties that go with obtaining major support from Member States for a Treaty, so efforts became more focused on seeking to bring about the advancement of introducing an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in Geneva.

Soroptimist International Foundation



**Maureen Maguire, SI President 2022-2023 and Joseph Mason,
Advocacy and Communications Coordinator**

Soroptimist International Foundation
(Registered in England and Wales 1194895)

In 2023, Soroptimist International Foundation continued to provide funding for projects that sought to Educate, Empower and Enable the lives of women and girls around the world. Soroptimist International Foundation is led by the SI President and Directors and receives funding from Soroptimist donations, legacies, grants, and other funding sources.

Soroptimist International Foundation is managed by the SI Board who act on behalf of the Trustee, SI (Soroptimist International) Limited. The Board ensures that funded projects meet the objectives as detailed below, having due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission, England and Wales in respect of public benefit.

The Objects of Soroptimist International Foundation are to promote either directly or by the encouragement and support of others:

- The advancement of education;
- The advancement of health and saving of lives;
- The relief and/or prevention of poverty;
- The advancement of good citizenship and community development;
- The advancement of human rights, peace, equality and diversity.

To date, Soroptimist International Foundation projects have addressed critical issues such as poverty, education, health, violence against women, and gender equality, all of which align with many of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

These projects have had a significant impact across different regions, empowering marginalised women and girls and fostering sustainable development within their communities.

Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal

'Opening Doors to a Bright Future' Appeal built on the learnings and success of many previous SI Appeals; uniting Soroptimists, Clubs, Regions, Unions and the five Federations, with the aim of delivering tangible benefits to some of the world's most marginalised women, girls, and their communities.

Projects have been undertaken in each of the five Soroptimist Federations. This Appeal sought to increase gender equality, women's empowerment and participation through education and training.

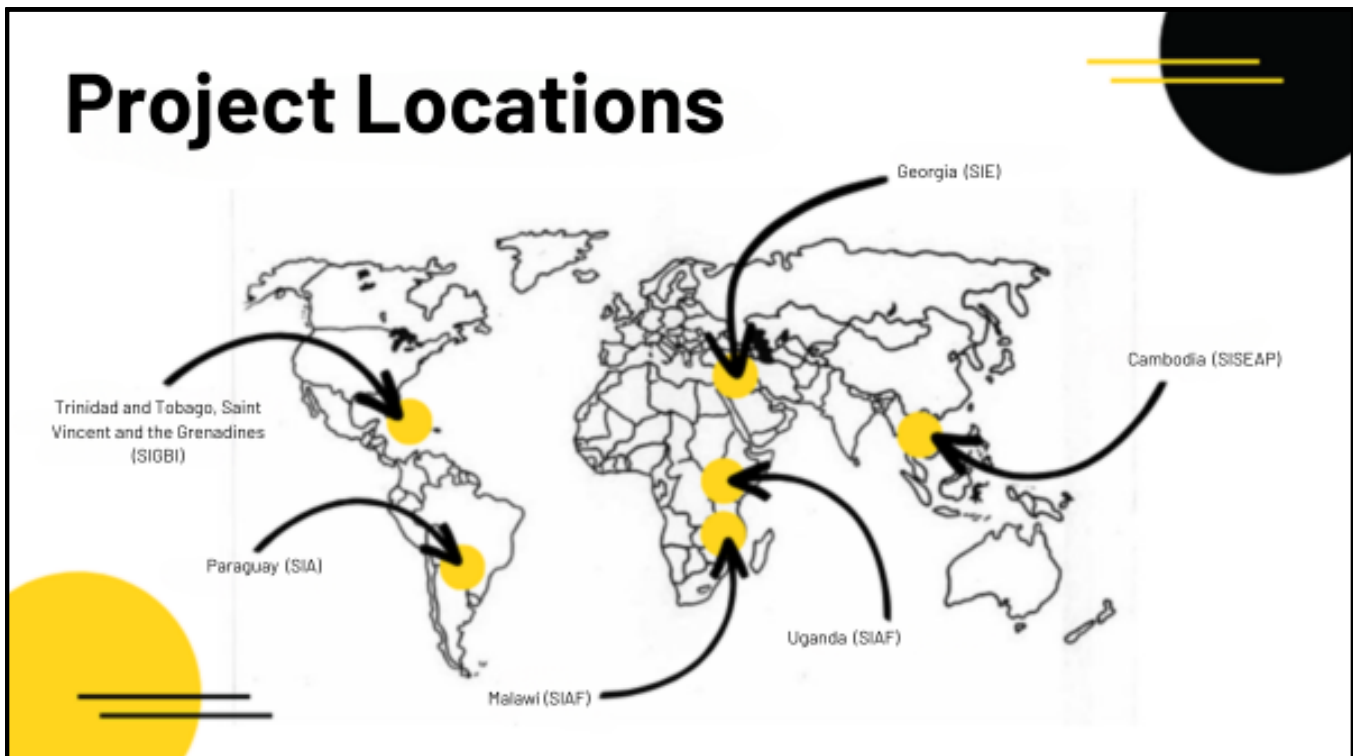


Photo: Map illustrating the locations of projects in the 'Opening Doors to a Bright Future' Appeal

Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Cambodia Community Dream Organisation

This project, titled 'Education and Learning in Cambodia throughout the life course', has been a beacon of empowerment for women and girls in rural communities. Partnering with the Cambodian Community Dream Organisation (CCDO), this project provided education and support to marginalised women and girls in three districts: Prasat Bakong, Angkor Thom, and Banteay Srei. During 2022-2023, the project exceeded expectations, engaging 2,814 women and girls in activities aimed at fostering education, empowerment and sustainable development.

This project has seen numerous achievements, providing training in healthcare, gender equity, personal development, and business skills. These sessions equipped women and girls with essential skills, boosted their confidence and enabled active community participation. Many of the women started small businesses, enabling them to maintain their households and send their children to school.

A key outcome of the project was the establishment of Smart Women groups, with members of each community serving as mentors and counsellors. These groups provided support and facilitated discussions on gender equality and women's rights. By December 2023, 46 Smart Women were trained, offering counselling under the supervision of the Commune Council for Women and Children; one of the Smart Women even became a Village Chief, while another joined the Commune Council.



Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Rose Academies - Uganda

The partnership with Rose Academies Uganda made huge strides toward educating, empowering, and enabling marginalised women, girls, and their communities through education, mentorship programmes, and access to information.

This project has provided the opportunity for 30 out-of-school girls and young women, aged between 11 and 22 years, to learn and feel safe while at school. The girls attended boarding school and worked hard so that they could take their leaving examinations at the end of November 2023. Many of the girls found the coursework extremely challenging because they had not been at school since Primary (Grade) 1.

Having completed their National Primary Leaving Examinations, the project continued to educate and empower the girls during December 2023. They were trained on social skills and health education, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate life's challenges and make informed decisions. This training served as a transformative experience for the attendees and the sessions were designed to foster positive self-concept, self-control and high order thinking skills.

During the training, the girls candidly shared their experiences of attending boarding school for the first time. While some struggled with health challenges and homesickness, others revelled in the opportunity to pursue education despite obstacles. The support received during their Primary Leaving Exams bolstered their confidence, paving the way for hopeful aspirations.



Soroptimist International Foundation continued



Restore a Sense of I Can – Caribbean

The partnership with 'Restore a Sense of I Can' (RSC) was aimed at educating, empowering, and enabling women and girls in the Caribbean by addressing the gender digital divide.

Through training and resources provided to women and girls in Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Venezuelan migrant women, participants learned basic digital technology skills, including online safety and how to become creators in digital spaces. By bridging the digital divide, the project empowered participants to make better decisions, gain self-confidence, and develop critical thinking skills, breaking down socio-economic barriers to digital opportunities.

Throughout 2023, the journey of empowering participants was marked by dedication, collaboration, and growth, despite several challenges. Participating women from diverse backgrounds embraced their roles and the opportunities presented. One strategic objective involved 'training the trainers', where five participants were recruited to vital roles as assistant instructors, peer mentors, motivational speakers, project facilitators and ambassadors. This comprehensive approach has ensured long-term project sustainability, enabling participants to gain new digital skills and invaluable teaching and support experience.

The success of this initiative extended beyond technical skills, fostering a supportive community where each participant's unique strengths contributed to the program's success. These women will continue to grow, translating their skills into income-generating opportunities and creating a ripple effect of positive change in their communities.

Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Life Skills to Empower Women and Girls – Georgia

The Opening Doors Appeal project in Georgia, Eastern Europe, worked in collaboration with World Vision Georgia, to empower women and girls by improving their life skills and employability, in a country where 74 per cent of women experience intimate partner violence.

This project supported 60 women and girls through interventions and workshops addressing four key focus areas:

- Skye Tech Clubs - Vulnerable girls and young women gained valuable IT skills and complex life skills. Participants emerged with essential skills in communication, leadership, and self-awareness, which are invaluable in any life endeavour.
- Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme - This programme helped young women access social and financial services and participate in community networks; they received training on areas such as sales management, business administration, digital marketing and more. Additionally, direct support and capacity building enabled the participants to discover their potential, improve their financial situation, enhance self-esteem, and make future plans.
- Advanced English Language Courses - The students learned to read, translate, and communicate fluently in English, engaging in spoken and written dialogues on topics like healthcare, education, work, and leisure. Beyond language skills, the program boosted their self-confidence, motivation, and workplace effectiveness, enriching their personal and professional development.



Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Sport Empowering Marginalised Girls – Paraguay

The partnership with Fundación Moises Bertoni (FMB) has given wings to a vision aimed at creating positive change for indigenous girls living in the shadows of poverty within the Mbaracayú Education Centre, Paraguay, based in the Mbaracayú natural forest reserve. This boarding school offers technical degrees in Environmental Science and uses a 'learning by doing' methodology to educate, empower and enable young minds to become powerful entrepreneurs capable of driving sustainable change in their communities.

By constructing a fully equipped sports centre, we sought to enhance physical activity, develop sports skills, and provide training for 120 girls under the guidance of a Sports and Exercise Science Teacher. Additionally, workshops covered topics such as gender violence prevention, self-esteem, collaboration, and nutrition.

A Youth Environmental Camp was also organised within the reserve for 40 participants aged 18 to 21, promoting gender equality, violence prevention, and environmental leadership. With objectives to bridge the opportunity gap, prevent gender-based violence, develop environmental youth leaders, and promote healthy living, this project harnessed the power of sport to empower marginalised girls.



Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Amitofo Care Centre – Malawi

In Malawi, SI collaborated with the Amitofo Care Centre (ACC) to address child marriage and promote gender equality through education.

Funded by Soroptimist International Taiwan, the project focused on educating 150 former child brides, with 10 of them receiving a two-year bursary covering all educational expenses.

The project provided comprehensive support to improve the women's numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving skills, enhancing their employment prospects and quality of life.

Despite initial challenges, there were positive impacts on the participants' education and behaviour, showing improved attitudes and renewed focus on education.

The initiative emphasised the importance of seizing educational opportunities to create lasting change and called for continued support to expand the program, aiming to equalise educational opportunities for women in Malawi.



Soroptimist International Foundation continued



Women for War Torn Countries Appeal

Soroptimist International Foundation was very pleased to receive a donation of USD 100,000 from the SI Taiwan Region (SI Americas) to support women who have been affected by war and conflict within or outside of their countries.

During December 2023, the SI Board approved the first project which was in partnership with SI Lumière, Bamako in Mali who have been awarded GBP 41,000 to educate and support 100 displaced women and girls who have survived the war, and who fled from the locality of Menaka in Northern Mali to the Bamako District in the south of Mali because of war and the ongoing threat of terror. These women are likely to encounter some difficulties in education since their education and training opportunities were disrupted; so, a critical first task will be helping them become literate, before training in the processing of agri-food production.

The project's literacy element will take place in the first two months, focusing on developing reading and writing abilities. In the second part of the project, covering a further four months the women and girls will learn the techniques of processing local products such as wheat, millet, corn, ginger and garlic. During this training they will learn about food processing techniques such as conservation, storage, calculation of production cost and the application of hygiene measures.

In the final stage all the women and girls will be gathered to form a cooperative to implement their collective knowledge. Each of them will be provided with a kit to support them in putting quality finished products into packaging for selling on the market.

Displaced women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence and harmful practices such as trafficking, sexual violence, early child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). By offering this support the project will give these women and girls economic empowerment and help them to realise their potential so they can become equal leaders in the community in which they now live. In providing productive training and employment we can reduce their exposure to danger and help them achieve food security.

Soroptimist International Foundation continued

Visible and Vocal Appeal

In December 2023 the Visible and Vocal Competition was held in partnership with the Commonwealth Business Women's Network and was aimed at empowering girls aged between 10 and 11 years.

It had several key objectives such as:

- Encouraging girls to play a more prominent part in public life;
- Promoting an awareness of global issues;
- Improving the art of communication, encouraging girls to develop the skill to speak effectively and to articulate with clarity;
- Developing self-confidence and personality; and
- Encouraging higher order thinking skills such as research, critical and analytical thinking, evaluation, and synthesis of knowledge.

The competition took place on 10 December to commemorate Soroptimist International Foundation Day and the UN Human Rights Day, and it brought forth remarkable insights and thought-provoking speeches from seven talented young orators across the globe speaking on a range of topics. These outstanding young voices presented their perspectives on pressing global issues, showcasing their passion, intellect, and determination.

The first prize was won by Stefanie from the Philippines, who represented Soroptimist International of the Americas, and delivered a compelling speech on 'As girls, what can we do to address climate change?'. The second prize winner was Gaelle from Rwanda, who represented the Soroptimist International Africa Federation, and she addressed the barriers faced by girls in achieving their career aspirations. The third prize winner was Olivia from Australia, representing Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific, and she also explored the challenges hindering girls in achieving their career goals.



Photo: Stefanie, from the Philippines (pictured at her Grade 6 school graduation) was the Winner of the 2023 Visible and Vocal public speaking competition

Soroptimist International Foundation continued

The Lugari Youth Leadership Project

The Lugari Youth Leadership Project is a Leadership Training Programme established by Willing Hearts Society of Canada in Kenya 12 years ago.

This project continued to be supported by the SI Foundation in 2023 where it funded 200 girls aged 14 to 18 to attend the Youth Leadership and Mentoring Training at the Lugari Community Resource Centre in Western Kenya. The funding provided accommodation, meals, transportation, training materials and Days for Girls kits for the 200 girls who came from all areas of Kenya to participate in the Project that focused on leadership training, building engagement in peace building, good governance, human rights, finances, health, media, entrepreneurship and increasing community connection.

On completion of their training, the girls returned home, and it is hoped that they will utilise their skills to implement and innovate projects that directly serve the needs of their own communities, thus becoming catalysts of positive change. With this increased confidence, and a stronger more definite voice, the girls are empowered to become leaders and peace builders and act to bring about change, to end harmful gender discriminatory practices such as FGM, child marriage and domestic violence.



Ongoing Commitment

Soroptimist International Foundation has made significant strides in promoting education, empowerment, and gender equality through the projects during 2023 projects. Thanks to the generosity of Soroptimists from around the globe we will be able to deliver many of the projects again in 2024 to benefit more women and girls.

Soroptimist International Foundation remains committed to creating lasting, positive change in communities worldwide, reinforcing our dedication to improving the status and opportunities for women and girls everywhere.

Closing Remarks



Deborah Thomas, Global Executive Director

Dear Soroptimists

Membership of Soroptimist International not only gives you membership of your local Club, your Region and Federation, but also gives you a global perspective and opportunities through your direct connection to the Soroptimist International team of volunteers and staff. The Team work closely together to advocate on your behalf at seven United Nations Centres; they give stimulus to our newly established Soroptimist International Foundation which is now the home for all our international projects; they ensure that through our multiple communication channels we engage and inform you of all the work we do for women and girls at global level, and in July 2023 the Team came together to deliver the inspiring 2023 SI Dublin Convention.

2023 was a year filled with achievements: the most successful SI Convention for over 20 years with 1,797 registered delegates; SI authoring and signing onto more statements than ever before; a significant increase in invitations for SI to participate in global level meetings and seven projects delivered around the world, funded by Soroptimist member donations to support the education and advancement of women and girls in their communities.

During 2023 we welcomed new staff to the Team to advise and support SI's global policy work and to deliver and drive forward our global communications strategy, reaching more Soroptimists than ever before. The breadth of professional expertise across the Team of volunteers and staff is quite staggering. There are multiple ways to get involved in our work: we appoint new Directors to our Board annually from each Federation; we recruit a new Treasurer and a new Director of Advocacy each biennium; we continuously seek to expand our team of UN Centre based Representatives; we need more mentors for our newly established Youth Forum and we often create working groups to help us with short term specific projects. Keep an eye on our social media, SI Global Voice newsletter or contact your Federation to learn of our voluntary opportunities.

In July 2023 we held our 22nd Quadrennial, International Convention in Dublin, Ireland. An overwhelming success with delegates registered from right around the world, with incredible keynote speakers; Federation run workshops with standing room only; an inspiring poster competition encouraging clubs from around the globe to showcase and share best practice projects; and let's not forget the vibrant Friendship Evening and stunning Gala Dinner.

The impact of the Convention continues with many new connections made between members, new and renewed friendships, new and expanded knowledge of our work at the UN and last but not least of all, the implementation of our refreshed SI Lady Emblem and branding, taking us forward into our second 100 years. Using a uniform Emblem and our official branding helps us all to continue and grow recognition of Soroptimist International, the global organisation, all of our wonderful work carried out at multiple levels demonstrating the extensive range of our work, from SI's grassroots to influencing global policy at the UN.

Closing Remarks continued

During the Convention SI President 2022–2023, Maureen Maguire, launched Soroptimist International Foundation. The Foundation, established as a Trust with charitable status, was created to enable Soroptimist International to be able to account accurately for its project work, take advantage of its charitable status and be better positioned to apply for grants and funding. The final SI President's Appeal, Opening Doors to a Bright Future was managed under the Foundation, as will further projects supported by the SI President. Soroptimist International Foundation has also received some significant donations from Soroptimists enabling us to offer specific funding for the education of women from war torn countries in addition to some very generous Soroptimist legacies, for which we and our beneficiaries are truly grateful.

One of the final new initiatives implemented in 2023 was establishment of the SI Youth Forum. Led by SI President 2022–2023, Maureen Maguire, this initiative enables our younger members from around the globe to connect with each other, and to Soroptimist International. This ensures that we have a pipeline to our younger voices and enables us to capture a wide variety of opinions and issues which are pertinent to them, and women and girls globally.

With the closing of the 2022–2023 biennium I wish to pay tribute to Maureen Maguire who worked tirelessly as SI President for the biennium, an outstanding leader who seamlessly led the work of staff and volunteers alike. The 2023 Board of Directors, who are all Soroptimist volunteers, worked so hard on your behalf during 2023, whether on finance, governance, Soroptimist International Foundation, communications or advocacy, their commitment was notable, thank you it was a pleasure to work with you all.

The new and existing members of the SIHQ team demonstrated commitment and professionalism throughout the year. New staff members hit the ground running to support the work of the SI Board and UN Representatives, but their 'pièce de résistance' was the excellent communications coverage of the SI Dublin 2023 Convention. SIHQ team, I thank each of you for all that you do for Soroptimist International. Finally, I must acknowledge and thank the SI Dublin 2023 Convention Committee. Together with our local Convention Committee, you worked so hard for many, many months, preparing the Convention for us all, with such wonderful outcomes. Thank you.

Soroptimists, I do hope that this annual report of 2023 has provided you with some learning, some inspiration and some knowledge of how you can get involved. Along my journey of nearly 11 years working with you all, I'm often heard to say "you learn something new every day at Soroptimist International" which is testament to your truly wonderful organisation.

Together, we achieve so much for women and girls everywhere; we help locally in our countries, cities and towns, we help those fleeing persecution and abuse, we provide education for those who have not had opportunities to learn, and we are a notable voice for women and girls at the UN where we advocate and influence Global Policy.

**We are a constant Global Voice speaking up for women and girls
in all their diversity.**

Congratulations Soroptimists, you are amazing!

List of Members of the Company, Directors, Staff, Position Holders who served during 2023

Members of the Company

Soroptimist International of Americas Federation
Soroptimist International Africa Federation
Soroptimist International of Europe Federation
Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland Federation
Soroptimist International of South East Asia Pacific Federation

Serving Directors 2023

Maureen Maguire, President, Chair of Global Policy
Leigh Ellwood-Brown, Director of Advocacy, Chair of Global Impact
Kathy King, Treasurer
Constance Mutunhu, Chair of Finance
Isobel Smith, Chair of Global Communications
Oludewa Thorpe, Chair of Governance
Susan Williams, Chair of Soroptimist International Foundation
Taeko Endo
Hafdis Karlsdóttir
Barbara Kohl
Theresa Lyford
RoseMary Reid
Joanne Yeoh

Serving Officers 2023

Siew Yong Gnanalingam, President Elect
Margaret Emsley, Procedural Consultant

Position Holders 2023

Beverly Bucur, Advocacy Advisor
Pat Black, Advocacy Advisor
Linda Witong, Advocacy Advisor
Isobel Smith, HR Liaison
Liz Dominey, Chair of Opening Doors Appeal
Gerda Huisman, Archivist
Wendy Logan, Treasurer Elect

Staff

Deborah Thomas, Global Executive Director
Hana Smith, Global Policy Advisor
Isabelle Salter, Communications Manager
Joseph Mason, Advocacy and Communications Coordinator
Martyna Wykrota, Executive Assistant

United Nations Representatives

New York

Bette Levy
Frances Zainoeddin
Jackie Shapiro
Maria Fornella-Oehninger
Vanessa Treers

Geneva

Berthe De Vos-Neven
Donatella Benjamin
Stacy Ciulik

Paris

Evelyne Para
Marie-Christine Gries
Rina Dupriet

Vienna

Marion Prechtl
Christine Peer
Martina Gredler
Marcella Sigmund

Rome

Liliana Mosca

Nairobi

Mary Muia
Beatrice Oluoch

Bangkok

Theresa Devasahayam



a global voice for women

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