



ADVOCACY MANUAL

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Direction

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Purpose of this document

Most of us have so far hardly ever been engaged in advocacy. Advocacy is quite complex because it involves a variety of approaches, tools and methods, and it requires that we obey to some rules. For some years now, Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) has been encouraging and supporting advocacy campaigns by unions and clubs. This advocacy manual is meant for Soroptimist members who would like to learn the advocacy basics. Whether you are taking your first steps or already have some experience, this is a short, but comprehensive manual for you.

Foreword:

What is advocacy? And how does it relate to programme and communication?

Advocacy means raising our voices, speaking up, contradicting, and being present and visible. It is a deliberate process that covers a broad range of activities according to the target and conditions, like awareness-raising, lobbying, public relations and influencing specific legislation. While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying.

Advocacy is any action that argues for a cause, supports, defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It includes public education and work before administrative bodies. Soroptimist advocacy is necessarily political in its essence, but it remains independent of any political party. It is inherent to advocacy that results are often difficult to measure.

Soroptimist advocacy stands out compared to advocacy by most other NGOs in that it is backed up by the vast project work of the clubs and unions. All this grass-roots work gives credibility to our claims. Thanks to our experience with programme work, we boost our advocacy. Often, advocacy and programme are done in combination.

However, in some cases, advocacy has little to do with programme, i.e. messages or calls for action, interviews in newspapers or on TV, statements, posts or letters sent out with the purpose of influencing, raising awareness or demanding further action by a particular addressee, such as a decision maker. For this type of advocacy, good letter-writing skills or good presentations are advantageous. Thus, advocacy also needs close cooperation with communication.



1. What is SIE advocacy about

The goal of Soroptimist is to transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities. As such, women and girls will achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

The five main strategic objectives of Soroptimist are:

- Violence against women
- Education
- Women's empowerment
- Health & food security
- Sustainability

Among these five objectives SIE currently concentrates on two, namely education and the eradication of violence against women.

There are two ways Soroptimists can contribute to achieving this goal: either through hands-on help, i.e. programme, or through advocacy. Programme is about our grass-roots work, often on a person-to-person basis, while advocacy aims to change the mindset of people, especially of politicians, but also of the general public. Often, programme and advocacy can be combined. They back each other up. Good communication skills are instrumental to convey messages to the public and to decision makers.

Advocacy within SIE is not militant, but it requires that we openly stand up for women, that we become publicly visible with our claims for women's issues. Every club and every union is different and will do advocacy in a different way.

SIE collaborates with the Union Advocacy Coordinators (ACs) in the quest of consistency of our messages and a unique SIE "brand". On one hand, the ACs report to SIE examples of good advocacy practice in their unions, and on the other hand they give advocacy impulses from SIE to their unions. The ACs exchange among each other and with SIE and harmonize advocacy within the Federation.

In addition, SIE stands up for our values with public statements on special UN days throughout the year and when European-wide threats to women's human rights arise.

SIE's representation in the European Women's Lobby, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe:

In addition to advocacy by clubs and unions, SIE has a representative each to three European institutions. They lobby for the status of women, in the same manner as the SI representatives at the UN institutions do all over the world. At their institutions, they obtain first-hand information on women's issues, which are valuable for Soroptimist advocacy in unions and clubs, but also for SIE advocacy statements. At their institutions, they give evidence of Soroptimist expertise, with Program Focus Reports (PFRs) showing examples of project results. The three institutions are the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

2. Some basic rules for SIE advocacy

Before you start with advocacy, be aware of two basic rules: the statement should be correct and made by the right person, and the correct emblem and branding should be deployed. Consistency in what we say and how we say it is of the utmost importance. It strengthens our efforts and makes them recognisable throughout all towns, regions and countries.

2.1. Soroptimist statements: what about them, who can make them

Advocacy is raising one's voice to achieve change. The most important part of any advocacy action is the message it wants to convey. This is done in a statement.

2.1.1. What is an advocacy statement?

A statement is a clear expression of something in speech or writing. Thus, any letter to a mayor, a call for political change in a public discussion, or a post which asks for action etc. is a statement. As soon as our emblem is present, or as soon as the word "Soroptimist" appears on the statement or is pronounced in a public discussion or speech, our statement will be linked to our organisation. Therefore, we need to be careful that we do not exceed our individual competence or wrongly claim an issue to be a Soroptimist issue.

2.1.2. What can a statement be about - sensitive topics?

In most cases, it is easy: as long as we advocate issues which have been defined by SI in the "where we stand" statements (<https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/members-area/si-statements/>) we can go ahead. Each Soroptimist, no matter her function within our organisation, can make advocacy statements which conform to those statements, for example: "Soroptimists are against child marriage" or "Soroptimists call for gender equity in leadership positions".

For good reasons, some controversial or sensitive topics are not included in the SI statements such as religious questions, abortion rights, prostitution, and surrogate motherhood. There are diverging standpoints and rule of law within our organisation and respective jurisdiction on these issues, which need to be respected. If Soroptimists want to address one of these topics or others, which are not covered by the "where we stand" statements, they can only do so within their official capacity (see 2.1.3.).

However, every Soroptimist can still state on these issues in the name of Soroptimist if the focus is not on legislation or moral questions, but on the dignity and the human rights of the woman. We must avoid making any political claim or moral statement concerning these topics. It is a difficult balance and needs diplomatic sensitivity. Thus, for example, any Soroptimist can state about abortion or prostitution that everything should be done to guarantee the mental and physical health of the women and that never any coercion may occur. But when acting as Soroptimists they should not say they are for or against abortion or support/condemn women in prostitution. In 2021, SIE issued a guideline on sensitive topics (members area -> downloads -> Programme and Advocacy -> Advocacy tools)

2.1.3. Who can speak in the name of Soroptimist International?

As a **member** of Soroptimist International not occupying any office, you can only speak or write in your own name, e.g. “as a Soroptimist I call for better childcare facilities in MyTown”. Exception: when you speak generally about a topic which is in line with the SI statements, e.g. “We Soroptimists urge our governments to ensure equal representation in decision-making”.

A **club president** can speak in the name of her club. When she writes letters, posts statements and speaks in public, she represents the opinion of her club. E.g. “the club SI of MyTown condemns the lack of an officer for gender equality in our municipality”. However, she can always repeat our global statements e.g. “Soroptimists all over the world call to stop violence against women”.

A **union president** speaks in the name of her union. Specific topics of her statements may only concern her own union. E.g. “We ask our government to significantly raise the budget for the helpline for women victims of violence”, but not “The Soroptimists of MyCountry ask the president of ThatCountry to free the defender of women’s rights HerName”.

The **SIE president** speaks in the name of her federation and - as a rule - only on federation issues. Any political statement concerning a specific SIE-country will only be communicated after consultation with the concerned Union president.

2.2. Soroptimist emblem and branding

We ask all Soroptimists to use the same emblem and to adhere to our branding guidelines. We are recognised by them and if we consistently and consequently use them, our visibility will enhance. Compare it with Coca Cola: all over the world the same red colour and typical writing are used and recognised.

We should never alter our emblem. While SI uses a black emblem, that of SIE is blue. For special advocacy campaigns, the emblem can be white with a transparent background that matches the colour of the campaign, e.g. an orange background for the orange days.

The right emblem and other supporting materials for your campaign can be downloaded in the SIE member area on our website.

- **Emblem:** Downloads -> Communication -> Logos & Templates
- **Letterheads and slogans:** Downloads -> Communication -> Logos & Templates
- **Template for press and letters** will be provided by SIE and will be made available in the member area.
- **Posters, flyers, and banners for social media** for specific SIE-supported advocacy campaigns: Downloads -> Programme & Advocacy -> Advocacy Campaign SIE Federation-initiated -> Posters.

3. A six-step approach to get you started with advocacy



3.1. What is your goal, what do you want to achieve?

- **Identify the problem**

Examples

- harassment in the workplace
- denied access to education
- increased domestic violence in pandemic times and the lack of women's shelters
- prevention of violence
- attitudes of gender-biased decision-makers
- human trafficking
- child marriage...

- **What change do you want to achieve**

Examples

- raise general awareness,
- change the mindset in society,
- exert pressure on decision-makers,

- make people react

3.2. What is your target audience, whom do you want to reach?



The general public, young people, local authorities, municipalities, women victims of gender-based violence, students, girls, men – general members of the society or specific decision makers?

Choose wisely and focus well. It will help you decide what to do. The better the focus the better the expected result.



3.3. Which channels are you going to use?

The possibilities are endless: social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, videos, posters, flyers, banners, letters, an email campaign, a march through the city, a flash-mob, a film projection, hand-outs like cards or handtowels printed with helpline numbers, conferences, panel discussions, school presentations and meetings with students, a webinar, a petition, radio or tv interview, etc.



Spotlight on 'classical' media

When you address (local) newspapers, magazines or even tv stations, be aware that journalists are terribly busy and receive many messages. So, make your message stand out. Be concise and to the point. For local newspapers and magazines, it is welcomed if you write the article yourself. Make sure you provide good quality pictures. When you are interviewed, prepare yourself well and wear your badge.

It is good practice to build solid contacts with journalists in order to be able to showcase your work.



Spotlight on political bodies

Soroptimists as experts

As Soroptimists we are active members of civil society and therefore good witnesses of problems in our societies. Due to our programme and advocacy work we have access to information and can gain extensive knowledge on issues about the status of women. Some members gain expertise in the context of their profession. We should not underestimate our expertise which can help politicians to understand issues at stake. Don't hesitate to contact local or national politicians on issues where you have expert knowledge, whilst keeping in mind who can speak in name of Soroptimist, cfr chapter 3.1.3 of this manual.

Soroptimists as pressure group

By addressing our concerns to politicians, we can influence their decisions. You can contact politicians by mail, phone or you can of course meet them. It may be necessary to be somewhat persevering in order to get a reaction. Open letters to the press can be an option. If there is enough pressure, your municipality might - for example - decide not to finance a new football ground in town but to enhance security for women and girls. Politicians want to be re-elected, so they listen to their voters' wishes. If we do not make our demands heard, we do not achieve anything.

Petitions

Most communes and countries give their citizens the possibility to submit petitions in view of changing law. Don't hesitate to make use of this option. A good example is the petition to make up skirting (taking photographs from under the skirts) a criminal offence, which was first successful in Great Britain and then also in Germany.



3.4. What is the message you want to convey?

Carefully define a **clear statement**. Rework it for the different channels you want to use. Keep your overall baseline very short, two to five words, a short sentence. People must be able to read it in a flash and recognise it any time. Of course, when you write letters or flyers, this message needs a context. Write it as concisely and understandably as possible. Nobody wants to spend more time than necessary on reading and understanding.

Do you have all **the necessary information**? The credibility of a claim is much higher when correct and verifiable numbers can be given. It might be worthwhile to contact local agencies for a clear picture of the situation. Otherwise, there are national and international institutions, which publish data regularly. Claims are stronger when they are supported by reference to international treaties, therefor see part 5.1.



3.5. Bringing it all together in a plan

It is of great importance to start early, to get all elements into place. Make a timeline and follow it carefully. For certain campaigns, permits are required from the local authorities, or a room needs to be identified and rented well ahead of time,

newspapers and tv work with strict deadlines. A well-prepared advocacy campaign needs time...

While drafting your plan, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What is the best time to launch your action?** It could be a UN special day - e.g. 25 November or 8 March, before a city council decision, etc.
- **Do you combine your efforts with a partner organisation?** Partnering up with other like-minded organisations, e.g. Zonta, UNICEF or UN Women, may have a bigger overall impact. In case of co-operation with other organisations, a clear plan needs to be agreed upon, to avoid misunderstandings. Pay attention not to be instrumentalised by your partners, especially in case of very experienced ones. The Soroptimist contribution needs to be clearly visible and communicated. A letter of understanding might need to be signed at the very beginning of the cooperation.
- **Do you work with programme?** Yes, definitely, as much as possible. It is our “unique selling point” that Soroptimists do both: programme and advocacy, i.e. grass-roots work to concretely help, and lobbying for women’s rights and their empowerment. The combination of both gives visibility to programme and credibility to advocacy. For example, when your club supports a shelter for victims of violence, you should not forget to lobby at the same time for better funding for them.
- **Who will lead the campaign?** It is best to work in team with advocacy and programme, and all interested members, but have one member as coordinator. If you combine your efforts with other organisations, be sure to be in the lead team, and even better to be the overall leader. Always pay attention that you keep your club or union president informed.
- **What does it cost?** Most advocacy campaigns are very low-cost. Make a budget to see if the club can finance the campaign. Some local authorities have budgets for actions and are willing to support civil society projects. It is always worthwhile addressing the ‘person responsible for gender equality’.



3.6. Measure the outcome and report

Document your advocacy action or campaign with good quality photos or videos, the messages and material you use, media articles, facts & figures and other relevant information. It will also help in preparing the Programme

Focus Report (PFR), which must be completed on the SIE website after the campaign.

Due to the nature of advocacy and communication in general, it is usually difficult to quantify the result. What you can use are e.g. data from the social media channels you used, the number of press mentions, and press articles compared to the size of the readership of the newspaper or magazine, the number of participants, etc. Of course, if a law would be changed or put into place, that would be the *nec plus ultra* of your efforts.



The benefits of reporting in PFRs

Record every advocacy project in a Programme Focus Report (PFR), as we do with all our projects that have been completed.

Please, be aware that only the Programme Director or the Assistant Programme Director of your club and of your union can add or change PFRs via the SIE extranet.

A strong PFR database has multiple benefits.

- **Internal Information**

Clubs and unions can get information and exchange ideas and practices for future campaigns. Use this database to gather ideas for your next campaign. Projects give a good evidence of what Soroptimists are doing: not only talking, but also take action.

- **Utility for political lobbying**

When we lobby for the status of women at the European institutions or at the UN, it is important to be able to show what Soroptimists have achieved. Without reporting via PFRs, nobody can say how many advocacy campaigns were done and what they focussed on. The same applies for your programme work: if it is not reported, we cannot use it to underline our credibility when lobbying. A complete database of all our projects will enhance our global voice for women and girls and reinforce our credibility as a reputable partner organization.

- **Access to ECOSOC**

Both SI and SIE hold general consultative status at the United Nations' ECOSOC (see 5.2.3.). This status grants us access to all UN Centres and attendance to conferences and forums. It also requires us to report on our work. This is impossible without PFRs.

- **A valuable resource**

When big issues are on the political agenda, our PFR database can give answers on how to respond to them. This has been the case several times at the Council of Europe where the PFR database could provide information, for example on the integration of migrants in our society with the help of Soroptimist commitment.

4. Internal resources for advocacy purposes

Both SI and SIE provide valuable resources for advocacy on their websites.

4.1. Material by SI

On the website of Soroptimist international you will find Position Papers and the organisations' stance on various issues that affect the lives of women and girls:

<https://www.soroptimistinternational.org/members-area/si-statements/>

4.2. Material by SIE

On the SIE website and on the member area of the SIE website you can find quite some material.

- **Advocacy materials and information:** Go to Downloads -> Programme & Advocacy. From there either to "Advocacy Campaign SIE Federation-initiated" or "Advocacy Training" or "Advocacy Webinars".
- **Emblems and templates:** Go to Downloads -> Communication > Emblem, logos & templates
- **Official SIE statement** on <https://www.soroptimisteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/sie-overview-brochure-en-apr-2021-1.pdf> to be joined to press statements, letters to stakeholders, etc.
- **Statements** on <https://www.soroptimisteurope.org/area-of-focus/advocacy/>
- **Position papers**, such as on sensitive topics. Go to Downloads > Programme & Advocacy > Advocacy Tools >

5. External resources for advocacy purposes

To give more credibility to our advocacy actions and campaigns, we must be able to provide facts and figures for the issue we address. In this chapter, we list a few international treaties and refer to non-Soroptimist specialist organisations, which provide the latest figures and trends. All these resources are also very valuable in gaining an overview.

5.1. International conventions and treaties useful for advocacy

5.1.1. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence - Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive international treaty on violence against women. All aspects are covered. We can refer to it whenever we fight for the protection of women against violence and for the support for victims. Most European countries adhere to it.

- A **summary** can be downloaded here <https://rm.coe.int/istanbul-convention-violence-against-women-brochure-4ps-en/16809ecc93>. It gives an overview in which ways Soroptimist as an NGO can promote its provisions.
- For more **in-depth** information use this link <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210>

On this page you will find links to:

- the text of the Treaty
 - the list of countries that have ratified it (ratification means that the Treaty has become state law)
 - the explanatory report with important details, for example on helplines and shelters for victims (article 23)
-
- Another good resource are the reports of **country evaluations** by an independent group of experts ("GREVIO"), where shortcomings of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention are pinpointed. The list of country reports can be found here <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work>

5.1.2. Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

The Convention is a comprehensive treaty mainly focused on the protection of victims of trafficking and the safeguard of their rights. It also aims to prevent trafficking as well as prosecute traffickers. For general information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/about-the-convention>. For more in-depth information: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/197?module=treaty-detail>

The Convention applies to all forms of trafficking, forced or through deception. Trafficking may result in forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation or slavery. The focus is on prevention and help for victims. This is a very exhaustive treaty, which looks at all aspects in

the context of trafficking. Like for the Istanbul Convention, there is an explanatory report and a list of signatory countries to be found under the link above.

- This link gives access to **two brochures** in all languages of the Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/leaflets#>
- The **list of country reports** by the monitoring body, GRETA, can be found here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/country-monitoring-work>

5.1.3. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW

In 1979, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has elaborated CEDAW as a very comprehensive document on all sorts of inequalities women suffer and how to overcome them. All SIE countries have ratified it.

Use <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Contact.aspx> as an entry point for more information.

5.1.4. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action goes into much detail about the status of women's rights and how to overcome inequalities. At that time, it was the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights.

It is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women. It still remains today the most comprehensive global policy framework and blueprint for action and is a current source of guidance and inspiration to realize gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, everywhere.

This landmark text was the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in September 1995.

Text of the Beijing Declaration:

<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>

5.1.5. Other treaties and recommendations

- Council of Europe recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)1](#) "**Preventing and Combating Sexism**": This is not a binding treaty, but a recommendation from the Council of Europe. This text can be cited for advocacy purposes ("the Council of Europe in its recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 stipulates that..."), and it is useful to obtain an overview on all aspects of sexism.
- N°5 of the 17 **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) of the United Nations focusses on gender equality and women's empowerment <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>, whereas goal 8 addresses the workplace and employment for all. These sources can be used for more general claims on women's rights. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational

Organized Crime, also called **Palermo Protocol**

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>

5.2. International organisations for data and facts

5.2.1. European Women's Lobby (EWL)

The EWL as an umbrella organisation for 2000 European women's associations (among them SIE) closely follows up with women's rights and gender equality in the states of the European Union and accession countries. It closely observes European legislation in view of women's issues. It is also a strong advocate for equal representation of women in political bodies, especially the European Parliament. <https://womenlobby.org/?lang=en>

5.2.2. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is a European Union body dedicated exclusively to gender equality.

The task of EIGE is to collect, analyse and spread data on the equality between women and men. They help institutions and Member States of the European Union to realise equality and to combat gender-based discrimination. EIGE has become a European knowledge centre for gender equality through its many resources and research results. Every five years it publishes a review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (see 5.1.4.) in the EU member states.

For inspiring information and many statistical data: <https://eige.europa.eu/>

5.2.3. UN Women

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life. UN Women has initiated and promotes the 16 days against gender-based violence, notably 'orange buildings'.

The **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Every year in March, thousands of women come together to its session at the UN headquarters in New York, among them a contingent of Soroptimists.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

The CSW being a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), only NGOs with consultative status can participate.

5.2.4. International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Referring to our striving for eradication of inequality - SDG 5 and 8 - ILO publishes statements on international women's day and has up-to-date statistics on forced work labour, slavery, human trafficking, parity etc. There are interesting links for articles or referrals: <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

5.2.5. Others

- HeForShe <https://www.heforshe.org/en>
- Women Deliver <https://womendeliver.org/>
- Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) <https://fra.europa.eu/en/about-fra>