
As a global organisation with members from diverse backgrounds and diverse life experiences, Soroptimist International’s aim is to ensure the end of gender inequality. This includes a commitment to ending discrimination against women based upon their role in reproduction. Through years of project experience, we know that without access to high-quality sexual and reproductive healthcare services women and girls face significant barriers to accessing education, being economically empowered, entering positions of leadership, and pursuing their ambitions. Women and girls who are affected by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are disproportionately affected by a lack of high-quality healthcare, including those who live in rural areas, who experience discrimination based on race or ethnicity, who are disabled, who have been trafficked, who have experienced violence and who are living in poverty.

SI believes all women should have the right to decide on the number and spacing of their children, and have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise this right. Women also have the right to decide freely on matters relating to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. Becoming a mother is an undertaking with risks, and through SI’s global policy and project activities, we have worked to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates by supporting healthcare facilities and services. The right to healthcare has been enshrined in international human rights law since the creation of the United Nations; it is a fundamental right which is a prerequisite for accessing and experiencing other human rights. Healthcare which is proven, effective, and improves reproductive health outcomes around pregnancy and childbirth, is vital to supporting these human rights. Soroptimist International supports a human rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health. To realise these rights, it is critical that women are leaders and decisions-makers in the realms of law, policy, medicine, and their own individual lives.

As an organisation involved in global advocacy at the UN, since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, Soroptimist International’s UN Representatives have advocated for the implementation of the definition of sexual and reproductive health set in the Beijing Platform for Action, agreed at that conference, as a minimum standard of healthcare. That defines reproductive healthcare as “the constellation of methods, techniques, and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.” Women and girls are a diverse community and all of them deserve to experience their human rights and the benefits of high-quality healthcare.

1 The phrase “multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination” is used in Soroptimist International’s global policy work at the UN. By using this language, SI recognises that women and girls experience discrimination based on their gender, but also that that discrimination is affected, exacerbated, or compounded by other forms of discrimination they experience based upon other facets of their identity. For example, a black woman may experience discrimination based on her gender and race, an older women may experience discrimination based on her age and gender, a younger, disabled woman may experience discrimination based on her ability to bear children, her youth, her disability and her gender. The phrase ‘multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination’ recognises that women and girls are a diverse group, who will live different realities, experience different impacts due to inequalities, and will require different specific and targeted actions to experience gender equality.
To end gender-based discrimination it is important to unite and advocate for what benefits the lives of women and girls. Access to high-quality sexual and reproductive healthcare remains vital to improving the lives of women and girls and ensuring the achievement of gender equality. The reversal of Roe v Wade has brought with it worldwide awareness of the value of programmes and projects, including those carried out by Soroptimist International, in supporting women and girls. As an organisation, SI will continue to educate, empower, and enable all women and girls to make the life choices they need to pursue their ambitions and to one day experience gender equality.

To find out more about Soroptimist International’s position on sexual and reproductive health, please read our ‘Where We Stand’ position paper, available here.

To find out more about Soroptimist International’s position on maternal health, please see the ‘Where We Stand’ position paper here, which is currently being updated.