

**Soroptimist
International
Edinburgh
news
notes
anecdotes**

SIEnna 242 March 2026



Our SIE shrub in Saughton Garden which was planted to commemorate the 90th birthday of our club



Minutes of SI Edinburgh business meeting 11th March 2026

Our vision

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

Apologies: Nikki, Elena, Pat, Alison, Irene Gari (Susi Peacock)

Meeting chaired by Sue M.

Minute of meeting of 11th February 2026

Pick up Grange Fair as item on agenda.

Note Google Drive set up for photos – please keep sending to Elena.

Display at 90th anniversary to be agreed.

Liz proposed and Anna seconded the minutes.

1. SIE @ 100 celebration

Action: All please respond to the questionnaire by March 18th.

2. Scotland South Region event

- Update – venue now Carnegie Conference Centre, Dunfermline. Saturday 27th June
- Region Meeting on line (Zoom) March 28th 1000 - 1300

3. Treasurer

Note region fee remains same as this year
Proposed retain our membership fee at £130 to cover anticipated costs

4. Membership

Grange Fair event May 9th – 3 of us able to go so far

Leaflet – Pat and Anna updating

Action: Email them content ideas by March 31st

Anna and Liz to visit Nettl printers to look at ideas/costs for other resources

5. Programme Action

- Four members collected for **Marie Curie**.
- **IWD event:** Lindsey was able to attend and will write a piece about the day for SIEnna.
- **Art prize:** for student of Edinburgh College of Art showing sustainable use of textiles. **Action:** Alison and Liz meeting Collette at ECA to confirm criteria and arrangements for judging 19th March

- **Proposed Spring collection:** Smalls for All. **Action:** Donations to be brought to AGM in April.
- **Kids Love Clothes:** Agreed to approach for new date. **Action: Lindsey to follow up. (post meeting note – date agreed for 16th April 2026.)**
- **Orange café:** Saturday April 25th Patina Bakery, Edinburgh Central Tram, with Christine Jardine MP. **Action:** Liz to email café re possible booking and their views of us having material on display on the table.
- All to consider possible future locations e.g. universities, supermarket cafes.
- **Project with South Perth. Aus. re spread and impact: Action:** Anna and Liz to meet Clare L to discuss further

6. Programme: AGM: Alison will circulate 1st notice.

7. SIenna deadline Friday 20th March

8. AOCB:

No 63 AGM attended. Feedback next meeting. Myint Su shares will be given to the club.

Note SIGBI social media campaign re prevention of violence against women and girls – hoping to involve young men. May be materials can be used by SIE?

9. Dates to note:

- **Discussion re SIGBI position on transwomen March 25th 7.30pm hybrid**
- **Orange café 25th April -Patina Bakery**
- **Cardiff Conference 30 – 31st October**
- **100th anniversary December 6th 2026**
- **Prague SI Convention 30 Oct – 2nd Nov 2027**

PROGRAMME

25 March Discussion on the Club's policy over Trans people
 8 April Business Meeting
 22 April AGM

Date Reminder for Kids Love Clothes

We have a team of six members – Sue, Elaine, Winifred, Dorothy, Nikki and Lindsey heading out to Ratho Mains depot for KLCs on Thursday 16th April around 10am. If you still fancy joining the team for a little bit of 'sorting' just let Lindsey know or turn up on the day – it's always good fun!

EARTH HOUR this year takes place on Saturday 28th March at 8.30pm - if you can, switch of the electricity, heating, fires, telly -

the lot! To find out more, visit WWF and see how you can make a difference.

NHS care and investigation of Sexual Assault

I attended a talk at Queen Margaret University for International Women's Day on 5th March 2026. It was arranged by Aurora, which advances Higher Education Leadership for women. It was launched in 2013

The speaker was Carol Rogers who is a Forensic Scientist for over 20 years Carol was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Queen Margaret University in 2025. Carol grew up in Fife, and wanted to be a Forensic Scientist from the age of 12. She faced resistance as a woman when she wanted to be a Forensic Scientist. But she overcame the resistance and there are now more female Forensic Scientists. She attends the scene of a crime and then gathers evidence for court proceedings. She has to be cross examined in the witness box in court on her scientific findings. She works to bring justice to the families

To read more about Carol go to www.qmu.ac.uk

Carol Rogers -Laureation

Carol is now the National Lead Forensic Scientist for Sexual Offences with the Scottish Police Authority's Forensic Services for Scotland.

The care and investigations for sexual crimes are now organised by the National Health Service Scotland. Every health Board in Scotland has a service

Queen Margaret University runs a Post Graduate Certificate in Forensic Practice for nurses, midwives and paramedics in caring and forensic investigations in sexual crimes.

Carol helps to train the staff, and also has input into Continuous Professional Development. (CPD) She also keeps the service updated with the latest investigations.

Since April 1st 2022 the service is now run by NHS Scotland

Victims of Sexual Abuse should now call NHS 24

Sexual assault response co-ordination Service (SARCS) for people aged 16 and over.

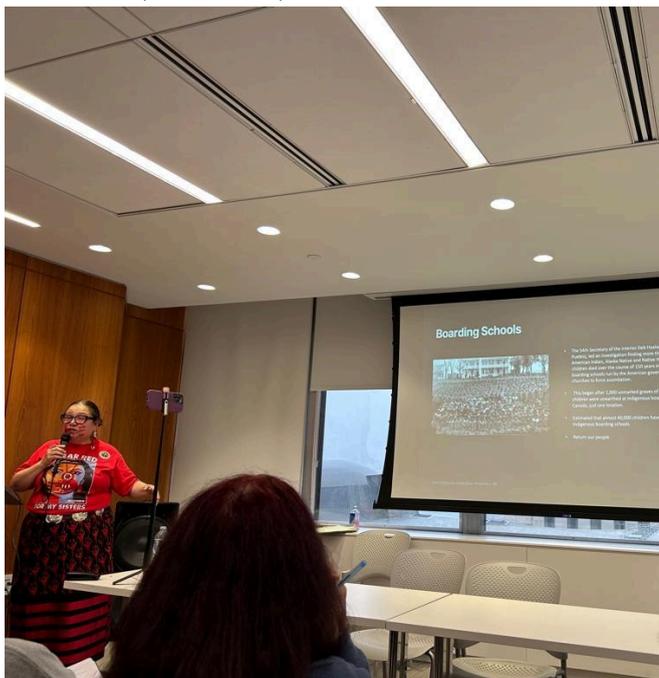
This offers medical, practical and emotional support to victims.

Tel 0800148 8888

There are also services for children under 16
 There is more information on NHS inform.
www.nhsinform.scot/sarcs
 People can still go to the police station and
 will then be referred to NHS 24
 If people need urgent medical attention they
 should dial 999
 or go to the nearest Accident and Emergency
 People have a choice of when and if they
 report crimes to the police
 The forensic samples of investigations are
 kept for 26 months and then discarded if not
 required. Anna 20/03/2026

**Report from SIE member Elena from the
 UN NYC on the Commission on the Status
 of Women**
CSW70 Parallel Event – Justice, Protection,
 and Health Policies for Vulnerable Women
 and Girls

This event brought together expert speakers
 including nurse and health professionals,
 academics, clinicians, and advocates.



The speakers discussed missing and
 murdered Indigenous women, non-state
 torture, forced child marriage, and domestic
 violence. My main take away from this event
 was the presentation by Dr Gloria Littlemouse.
 Dr Littlemouse is from the Lenape people and
 presented the case of missing and murdered
 Indigenous women. With 5712 missing people
 reported, only 116 were logged. In 2022,
 murder was the 3rd largest cause of death
 among young Indigenous women. For every
 missing Indigenous woman, they hang up a
 red dress which symbolises the spirit of this

woman. When the wind blows through the
 dress, it illustrates that the spirit of this person
 is still there. They also wear a painted red
 hand over the mouth, representing the silence
 of the media and law enforcement, on the
 missing and murdered Indigenous women.

One of the largest issues raised by Dr
 Littlemouse was human trafficking, a
 150-billion-dollar industry. People are sold
 multiple times a day, hourly. This is a serious
 issue and must be addressed and tackled, in
 addition to the unresolved and unlogged cases
 of missing Indigenous women. Additionally,
 Dr Littlemouse raised the issue of domestic
 violence, of which 1,5 million American
 Indian and Alaska Native women have
 experienced in their lifetime.

However, Dr Littlemouse also underlined the
 importance within the Lenape people to be
 who you are, to accept and love everyone, and
 to protect the land. In this context, she
 mentioned the Indigenous Two-Spirit
 identities, which is referred to as the
 Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
 Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex,
 and Asexual (2SLGBTQIA+). This
 demonstrates the diversity and inclusion
 promoted and celebrated in the culture.
 Overall, this event included inspiring stories of
 empowerment through culture, raised
 important awareness of a crisis that needs
 justice, as well as emphasised the importance
 of love and acceptance.

**16/03/2026 CSW70 Parallel event:
 Authoritarian Power, Gendered Body.**

Today I attended this informative and very
 important event moderated by Hafza Girdap
 representing Advocates of Silenced Turkey.
 This event brought together an impressive
 panel of experts: Rachel Miner, Dr Shilan
 Fuad Hussain, Cindy Morris, Prof Manisha
 Desai, and Sevinc Ozarslan. Rachel
 presented data regarding the core issue
 genocide, which occurs approximately every 2
 years. Politics of Autonomy



Although the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide does not include gender and political ideologies as part of the definition, Rachel suggested genocide to be a working definition and a developing term. Despite the UN referring to the situation in Afghanistan as gender apartheid, Rachel urged this as gendered genocide. Men are killed in genocide, but women are raped and sexually trafficked disproportionately more than men. Around 2900 women are currently held captive in ISIS sexual slavery, and families are unaware of their location. The lack of tangible legal frameworks for this was exemplified with the Epstein files.

Rachel also referred to genocide as a cycle, as countries who have experienced genocide in the past are 3 times more at risk of this happening again, exemplified with Palestine, Sudan, and Israel. It is therefore not random, but predictable, as the cycle becomes a trap. The earliest warning sign for genocide is the treatment of women's bodies, and we must therefore ask women what is missing. We must centre and give power back to women. Women are the experts in their own communities and families, and at the centre of their own narratives. Rachel is the CEO of Bellwether International where they take action to disrupt the cycle of genocide. This through working with women's trauma healing. Connecting body and mind heals trauma, and through their 8-week workshop with women they managed to reduce trauma scores from between 40-60/60 at the beginning, to 12/60

at the end of the 8 weeks. Women's bodies are therefore not only at the centre of genocide, but also key in the prevention of genocide through trauma healing.

Dr Shilan continued the discussion on women's bodies through her research on child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and honour killings, in Iraq. In this context, tradition is weaponised, and the past is used to continue control over women. FGM begins in early years, with the idea to be pure and acceptable for future husbands. Despite all diseases, FGM is the largest cause of death amongst women in the Middle East. Pain is hereby sacrificed for protection and moral duties, where marriage means years of silence. Honour killings are used to maintain patriarchal order. However, Dr Shilan reflected over the way women are also agents of their own oppression as mothers also participate in honour killings, which demonstrates how patriarchy is understood as a mindset. To disrupt this, education was argued to be the key and most forceful factor. These practises do not only happen in the Middle East, but travel with the diaspora, changing one's geography does not change ones constrains. Culture must not become a shield for inequalities, and for this pandemic of violence that hides behind the words respect, family, and honour. We must therefore challenge minds through education and ensure economic independence so women can make their own choices. Tradition never asked women what they want, and we must therefore not let culture and tradition reinforce systems of inequality.

Cindy Morris contributed to the panel with optimism and action for women, presenting her work with the organisation Women who Change the World. Emphasising that we must come together to make change fostering collective efficiency. It is important to keep the sense of community and not become isolated. Women must refine success themselves, self-determination was presented as a strategic approach to wellbeing. With the ability to create change through beliefs, and thereby make an impact, as participation fuels change. The continuity of trauma is central to oppression as one is then not able to move beyond. This amplifies the importance of the trauma healing work presented by Rachel. Professor Manisha Desai added to the

conversation with a different point on oppression. She discussed the way upper caste Hindus in the US have captured identity politics to define a Hindu American as opposed to Indian American to decry Hinduphobia. In this sense mobilising through social media and using this as a tool and strategy to create a multiracial alliance with American Republican supremacy. However, there are also the Hindus for Human Rights that work against these racist narratives.



Following this conversation, Servic, as a journalist from Turkey, presented cases of women in Turkey who have been deprived their rights, voices, and freedom. Intimidation is used as a weapon of war, as women who have been raped are afraid to speak up. Servic presented examples of women's experiences in Turkey, some who had been sexually assaulted during strip searches in prison, some who had been arrested for teaching English, playing bowling, had a picnic in the park, or studying together. She also shared stories of mothers who are seeking justice for their sons who have been imprisoned. Servic emphasised how women cannot have justice if they cannot speak of their experienced judicial and physical violence. We must therefore protect women's bodies, prevent torture, and ensure that mothers seeking justice are not treated as criminals, but respected for women's rights. Overall, this was an important event that gave platforms for these expert women to share their important and empowering work, inspiring action for justice.

17/03/2026

CSW70 Side Event – How Systems Fail Survivors: the Role of Justice and Financial Institutions in Causing – and Combating – Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

Today I attended this event hosted by FAST (Finance Against Slavery & Trafficking), World Without Exploitation, and the UNDP (UN Development Programme). The panel included the inspiring expert speakers Rebecca Zipkin, Sharlene Rochard, Liz Stein, Jill Hunder, and Rehab Al-Sanabani. The event was moderated by Dahlia Eddin Locke and included welcome remarks from the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, Reem Alsalem. The event was concluded and summarised by H.E. Andrea Mocano, Deputy Permanent Representative of Romania to the UN.

Reem opened the event with the importance of survival centred approaches. Survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking are often minimised and dismissed by policy systems that should protect them. Survivors must not be criminalised for crimes they were forced to commit. Another important part of the justice system is confidentiality, which is an obligation, survivors should not live with the fear of their traumas being exposed.

The exposure of survivors' trauma deters others to come forward and undermines the rule of law. Reem therefore called for data protection. Referring to the Epstein files, Reem exemplified how perpetrators of crimes against humanity are shielded by power. Poorly managed disclosure undermines law, and accountability cannot be negotiated by financial and power systems. Reem questioned why the red flags in the case of Epstein were not acted on, in consideration of financial systems that were allowed. Thereby calling for the closing of legal and policy gaps that allow abuse and exploitation. Reem also emphasised in this discussion that no one can consent to their own exploitation, and that prevention must therefore address demand. Trafficking is a transnational process and requires sharing knowledge systems. Reem called for systematic change, where the focus is survivors at centre, rather than men in power and institutions.

Rebecca contributed to the conversation with language and terminology awareness. In this context, Rebecca encouraged moving from the term “sex work” to “sex trafficking” and “prostitution” due to the exploitation involved, “sex work” is not work but a form of gender-based violence. The commercial sex market is growing, especially regarding buying children. Child or minor sex worker is neither used as this is considered trafficking. The largest risk factor for human trafficking is vulnerability and instability, where the buyers are men with greater economic and social power. Also exemplifying with the Epstein files, wealthy and powerful men bought vulnerable girls. However, there were many involved such as pilots, drivers, housekeepers, and doctors. This requires accountability, who facilitated and who profited from the abuse.

Rebecca emphasised what Reem mentioned, that demand drives trafficking. Commercial sex buying is also moving online, where the access to pornography and social media is normalising sex buying, and grooming is seen as flattering. It is easier to buy sex online as one can stay anonymous. Another distressing issue raised by Rebecca is how buyers are becoming younger and younger. Boys get addicted to pornography at a young age due to the easy access, and thereby become buyers through this normalisation. When discussing solutions and strategy, Rebecca also referred to a survival centred approach, bringing in the survival model into the conversation. This model was first implemented in Sweden in 1999, and holds buyers accountable, whilst supporting women with social services when exiting. In this model, the buyer is criminalised, not the survivor. Prostitutes are decriminalised, and buyers are exploiters, not considered legitimate buyers. This model has proved to increase the criminal investigation into sex trafficking. Rebecca therefore highlighted that justice should not expire, and we must address all parts of systems and legal frameworks that are failing to listen to survivors. We must not let survivors be held back by trauma, coercion, or fear.

Liz, as a survivor of Epstein, provided a brave and strong message through her contributions to the conversation, as a current human trafficking specialist. The criminal behaviours

in the Epstein files illustrate a crime, not a political issue. This case shows how systems protect powerful men, men who are willing to buy access to vulnerable women and girls. This is a business model of exploitation. Liz also contributed to the discussion of the language around this issue, when the term “sex work” is used, public policy normalises buying sex. Therefore, the survival model, as Rebecca mentioned, provides a better framework where the buyer is criminalised. By criminalising the buyer, the demand reduces, and these incentives can make trafficking less profitable. Liz also shared how trafficking is designed to distort a person from reality, and systems fail to understand the psychology of abuse. Networks and financial institutions must therefore be held accountable, and survivors must be included in creating policies aimed to tackle the issue.

Sharlene is also a survivor of Epstein and contributed with a strong statement and important contributions to the discussion. Emphasising the intersection of power imbalances, weak justice systems, and gender, and how this constitutes crimes against humanity. Sharlene also raised the important argument that children cannot consent when the perpetrator is in a position of power over them. We must not delay, deflect, or let evidence disappear. We must provide trauma informed, survivor centred approaches, where women are not seen as evidence, but human beings.

Rehab added to the conversation that survivors are not only harmed by traffickers, but by systems that do not listen, and when response is not designed. In relation to this, Jill echoed the importance of engaging with people who have lived experiences. H.E. Andrea Mocano summarised this conversation with the main take aways which included the importance of access to justice, placing survivors at centre in policies, courage to speak up, cross-national collaboration, and to follow the money to find who is benefiting, thereby who must be held accountable.

Overall, this panel provided important information and awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation and trafficking, as well as consisted of courageous and powerful testimonies.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



And it's Nicola in an 'orange' trouser suit!!

The event to mark International Women's Day, which is organised by the Scottish Women's Convention was held this year in the magnificent building of the Glasgow City Chambers – a change from the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. I was delighted that I was successful in the January ballot and even more so as though a Glaswegian by birth, I was never able to visit this illustrious building. The guest list of speakers was equally illustrious though a tad over political for my ears but accepting that the Scottish Parliament will go to the polls this May, the guests included Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Ash Reagan, Monica Lennon, Pam Gosal and Nicola Sturgeon who is due to step down as an MSP this year so perhaps the last time I will hear her speak. Pam Gosal – first Sikh and first women of Indian background in Holyrood and a hard-working domestic abuse campaigner, stood out as did Bailie Dr Soryia Siddique, a Glasgow city councillor who stressed that it was still difficult for Muslim women in politics. One of the best quotes for the afternoon was for me, 'too many women still face barriers.' I believe we must just keep fighting for that to change for all women, no matter their colour or religion who want to compete fairly in the world of business and politics.

Light relief was provided by no other than Elaine C Smith who chaired the panel discussion and on congratulating Monica Lennon MSP on her hard work in getting period products available in Scotland for all who need them – the first country in the world to do so, encouraged a generous round of applause then added – 'but what about the Tena ladies' – indeed!!

Finally, from Demet Kayaoglu, Deputy Consul General/Acting head of Mission Turkish Consulate General, another 'first position' for a woman, left us with a strong reminder 'every woman who takes her place at a negotiating table sends a message to other women and girls – we can all make a difference.'

For those members who are not aware of the work the SWC:

The Scottish Women's Convention is funded to consult with women throughout Scotland, so that their views and opinions can influence public policy and be reported to key decision makers at both a local and national level.

Lindsey