The Condition of the Girl Child worldwide
by Terre des Hommes
Sixth Edition - 2017
On the occasion of the **International Day of the Girl Child**, introduced by the **UN** in 2012 and celebrated yearly on 11 October, **Terre des Hommes** launches again the **“Indifesa” Campaign**. This initiative aims at safeguarding education, health, protection from violence, discrimination and abuse for girls worldwide.

With this important **awareness raising campaign**, Terre des Hommes places the protection of girls’ rights worldwide at the core of its interventions. It commits itself to defend their right to life, freedom, education, equality, and protection. It will achieve this starting from concrete field interventions, leading to tangible results in breaking the poverty cycle and offering better opportunities to thousands of girls and young women globally.

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A special thanks to **Translators Without Borders** for translating this dossier

Cover photo: © Angelo Ferrari

**Since almost 60 years, Terre des Hommes is in the front line to protect children worldwide** from violence, abuse and exploitation and to ensure every child with schooling, informal education, medical assistance and food.

**Terre des Hommes is currently present in 67 countries with 854 projects in favour of children.** Terre des Hommes Foundation Italy is member of the Terre des Hommes International Federation; it works in partnership with ECHO and is accredited by the European Union, the UN, USAID and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Foreword

A 12 year old girl runs away from home in Sicily. She realises that she is being groomed for an arranged marriage thousands of miles away. Her escape is aided by a boy her age and her school friends. There are no adults to trust, only the other children and the school as a place of reference and release. Such stories are not uncommon in our daily news. It happens more frequently in summer, for many a time for fun and for many of highest vulnerability, when a holiday in the immigrant family’s country of origin can coincide with a "cut" in honour of the still-widespread "duty" of practicing genital mutilation, a real attack upon the physical integrity and the rights of little girls, teenagers and women. That summer break may also serve to organise a “forced” marriage, to add yet another child bride to the millions already existing in the world. The photo of this sixth edition of the indifesa dossier reminds us that the rights of little girls and young women continue to be denied: schooling, education, the right to physical and psychological integrity, reproductive health, free choice and non-violent, non-exploitative migration; all of this is denied. In some fields and geographical areas, there have been improvements, but they have not managed to reverse the trend. Early marriages are decreasing in percentage but not in absolute terms. The fragility of many countries, wars and even climatic events push for early arranged marriages. While access to education, the key weapon in engineering a female future, remains barred. In Jordan, amongst the Syrian refugees, the number of marriages of this type has virtually trebled and the same is happening in Yemen, a country devastated by conflict. The broad global theme of inequality and poverty also has a dramatic impact on the fate of young girls. Many teenagers and youths come here or go to other European countries, driven by emigration that frequently bears the dramatic hallmarks of trafficking. The statistics often make no distinction between the gender of unaccompanied minors, jumbled together in an indistinct limbo. Whereas there is a need for specific support policies to be devised for them, the teenagers and youths at risk, with educational and vocational training, together with measures to protect them from violence, abuse and sexual exploitation. "Education in citizenship" is needed for everyone. And
awareness that protection of the rights of children and adolescents plays an important role in the empowerment of women, whether living in the wealthy northern cities or poorer southern outskirts.

*Vichi De Marchi, Director of WE—Women empower the World*
Introduction

We are publishing the sixth edition of our InDifesa Dossier - "Defenseless" - on time, as always, to report on the status of girls in the world, collating not only data and statistics, but also providing a description of situations and stories from real life experiences. As is the case each year, in writing this introduction and scanning through the pages of the various sections of the report, I am filled with a feeling of helplessness when faced with the level and nature of the oppression still suffered by girls, regardless of borders. In fact, in recent years, we have seen how some new instances of violation have emerged forcefully in areas previously exempt, such as in Middle Eastern theatres of war, where there is a proliferation of child marriages, encouraged by the false and completely aberrant conviction that they will be accorded greater safety in a position of enforced exodus if they are married off to a man who is always much, much older than them. Like Terre des Hommes Italy, in line with the other Terre des Hommes’ around the world, we are asking the Italian Government and the new Agency for Development Cooperation, which is run by a woman, to make a special commitment to deploy the means and resources to safeguard the rights of girls and young women in Italy and worldwide. Thankfully the Dossier also shows us areas in which progress has been made, such as in education, where the gap between males and females has fortunately narrowed in favor of girls and in the raising of the legal minimum age for getting married in many countries where child marriage is widespread.

Although the culture of female genital mutilation does not appear to be eradicated even when the family migrates and comes to Europe, we cannot deny, however, that considerable progress has been made in this field. I believe we owe this to women especially, to their courage, tenacity and, at times, their heroism. I’ll quote as an example one of the many stories we hear of during the year, the drama of which really struck me. It’s the story, which you will find in the dossier, of a young grandmother, whom I’ll call Grandma Courage who, after having to succumb to the inhumane practice of excision and also seeing her daughter succumb to it, was determined to snatch her
little granddaughter away from the fate destined for her and so made the dangerous decision to flee with her from her country - this a woman who had never even left her village before - to undertake a daring journey through the hidden dangers of the migrants' route across the desert and sea. Hidden dangers seemed less appalling and worrying to her than having to witness helplessly once again the violation and abuse inflicted on the body of her little granddaughter, Kirmani.

This story shows that the mentality in some developing countries is indeed changing and that when awareness is truly achieved you can really change the world.

**Donatella Vergari**, Secretary-General Terre des Hommes Italia Foundation
Chapter 1
Female genital mutilation
In the last few years, the campaign against female genital mutilation (FGM) is challenged by a new trend, the medicalisation of FGM. This means minimising the health risks associated with FGM, by having it performed in adequate operating rooms by trained medical personnel, who use sterile instruments and prescribe antibiotics and painkillers to patients following surgery.

28 too many is an organisation advocating for the abandonment of FGM in Africa, more specifically in the 28 African countries where it is most widespread. The report of 28 too many explains that one of the main arguments used to support the medicalisation of FGM is that it allows safer procedures in areas where the abandonment of FGM is currently not achievable. The report also underlines that, paradoxically, the trend of medicalisation of FGM originates from campaigns raising awareness about FGM and HIV. “The medicalisation of FGM has underlined the

1 “The medicalisation of FGM”, 28 Too Many, 2017
immediate and long-term risks associated with FGM. Unfortunately, medicalisation has actually prompted many parents to seek safer procedures rather than discourage the practice as a whole”. As a result, the cutting is more and more performed in hospitals by trained medical personnel. For example, in Egypt, the percentage of MFG performed by trained medical personnel has risen from 55% in 1995 to 77% in 2008².

In Kenya, 14.8% of girls and women aged 15-49 were mutilated either in a hospital or by a nurse. “What is even more disturbing though is that the figure for girls aged 0-14 is higher at 19.7%, indicating that this may be a growing trend”, writes Ann-Marie Wilson, founder and CEO of 28 Too Many³.

If, on one side, medicalisation helps to safeguard the health of women and girls by reducing immediate health risks, on the other, it does not eliminate the serious, long-term physical and emotional consequences of FGM, even when the procedure is carried out professionally (difficulty during pregnancy and childbirth, risk to develop cysts, gynecological complications, pain during intercourse). But, most importantly, FGMs are a violation of girls and women’s human rights, as stated by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

According to WHO's estimates, about 200 million girls and women living in 30 countries have been genitally mutilated⁴. Somalia is the country where FGM is mostly practised, concerning virtually all women (98% of women). Somalia is followed by Guinea (96%), Djibouti (93%), Egypt (91%), Eritrea and Mali (89%), Sierra Leone and Sudan (88%).

In other Sub-Saharan countries, such as Gambia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mauritania and Liberia, around 60-80% of girls and women undergo FGM.

In half of the countries where FGM is prevalent, most girls are mutilated before turning five years old (data available). In Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt and Somalia about 80% of girls are mutilated between 5 and 14 years of age⁵.

Campaigns to raise awareness on the topic have achieved significant results in the fight against FGM. However, due to the demographic increase in many of the countries where FGM is practiced, among other causes, the number of mutilated girls has actually increased.

If the present trends continue, 86 million girls born between 2010 and 2015 are likely to undergo genital mutilation by 2030.

This is an alarming figure, considering that today, there are over 125 million women who have undergone some form of female genital mutilation⁶.

But the scope of this phenomenon is not contained within the border of the countries where it is most common. Also in Europe, hundreds of thousands of women live with the consequences of FGM (around 500,000) or risk to undergo FGM (180,000)⁷. On the other hand, such estimates date back to 2012 and experts tend not to consider them reliable because different methods were adopted in different countries.

In the UK, for example, the research was conducted by using the national health service census data, to evaluate the number of women seeking medical attention to treat complications associated with FGM.

5,700 cases were treated between April 2015 and March 2016⁸.

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² https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5364567/
⁴ http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/
⁸ https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/safeguarding/our-work/fgm/
A higher figure compared to the one estimated in the period between April 2016 and March 2017 (around 5,000). At the urging of some NGOs advocating for the protection of girls and women, a similar study was conducted in the States as well, by the US Department of Health and Human Services, in cooperation with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. According to data, about 513,000 girls and women underwent or risked to undergo genital mutilation. A number three times higher than the one suggested by a study conducted in the 90s.

#indifesa Stories

**Kirmani, saved by her grandmother**

It is yet another day that the migrants who came ashore in Pozzallo, line up to the identification proceedings, before being transferred to the Hotspot. Among them, I see Amara, a West African woman, together with a little girl, and I ask her how they are doing. It is a procedure we follow to identify potential psychological distress after such a long journey, without being intrusive.

I meet Amara’s eyes, I see suffering and exhaustion in them: “I am tired”, she answers. Nevertheless, those eyes are not empty. There is still a ray of hope.

I explain to her that once they have received medical assistance, water and food, me and the other members of the psychosocial support team of Terres des Hommes, will be there, to give them psychological support as well as to help them adjust to the centre. Amara tells her story in one breath take during the interview, as if urged by the need to alleviate its weight on her chest, to ease the pain which inhabits her body, and finally find a moment of comfort, away from the suffering that she has gotten used to living with, and which has been tormenting her for years.

Amara comes from a Muslim family and attended school until the age of 14. One day, during the summer holidays, her family handed her over to a women’s secret society, so that she could be initiated into adulthood.

Such secret societies, exist both for women (Sande or Boro) and men (Poro), and are common in many West African countries. The leaders, called soweis, submit little girls and women to FGM as a rite of passage from adolescence into adulthood. FGM initiate them to the traditional duties of women and prepare them for early marriage.

Amara remembers that they woke her up in the middle of the night, and conducted her blindfolded into the bush against her will. There, she underwent FGM together with other 20 girls. Her memory of this brutal and traumatising ritual still burns vividly even though many years have gone by. Approximately two weeks after the ritual, the soweis brought her to the sea to perform a second purification ritual in water.

Amara was then forced to become the second wife of a much older man, thus thwarting her desire to continue her education. Her mum told her it was impossible, for “her breasts had grown, and she must marry”. At 15, she was pregnant. Her husband never took care of her or her children (two girls and one boy), claiming he needed to maintain his first wife and her children. After years of social exclusion, Amara founded a sensibilisation group together with other activists of her village to raise awareness on FGM and its consequences, as well as to encourage girls to continue their education.

To retaliate, the secret society that Amara “belonged to” kidnapped her daughters to subject them to FGM. Amara managed to save one, the mother of Kirmani, the little girl who disembarked with her in Pozzallo, while her other daughter got killed. Blinded by pain and loss, Amara set on fire the place where the rituals were performed.

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9 http://content.digital.nhs.uk/searchcatalogue?q=%22female+genital+mutilation%22&area=&size=10&sort=Relevance
10 https://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/EN_FAQ_FGM_in_US.pdf
These events strengthened her commitment to raising awareness of the violence of FGM among girls, which she did, traveling from village to village. During her absence, she could not supervise her daughter, who became pregnant with Kirmani.

The soweis wanted to subject Kimari to the same destiny as Amara’s, but Amara eventually managed to run away and save her granddaughter.

The journey to Italy lasted several months. Amara remembers walking for 170 km across the desert. Then, she was imprisoned in Sabha, where she was a victim of physical and sexual violence and witnessed the killing of other people. With the help of a woman, Amara and Kimari managed to escape and embarked on a ship in Sabratha.

Amara tells the story of a traumatic boat journey from Libya to Italy, during which the engine of the boat broke, the sea was agitated and the migrants were blocked at sea for many hours, panicking: “I prayed and sang...” She was losing hope.

“When I saw the rescue boat, I was scared they would arrest us”.

I listen to the pain in Amara’s words, the way she screams while telling her story, giving voice to the multiple wounds marking her soul and body. Her wounds speak of the reiterated human violence she endured. Her tears force her to take some breaks while she’s telling her story. Yet, at the same time, this woman shows a strength and determination to survive which seem to originate from a greater force and prompt her to carry on: “What gave you the strength to continue your journey, Amara?” I ask her. She stops for a moment.

“Kirmani, she gives me hope... I want her to have a different future, I would like her to study in Italy”. I look at her, and despite the wounds marking her body, I see the beauty and strength of an intelligent woman, capable of a loving concern towards her granddaughter as well as fully aware of her migratory project. She simply asks for support, to win the battle she’s fighting for her granddaughter, and to share her story, in order to contribute and change the destiny of the girls and women of her country.

Marianna Cento, Psychotherapist and Field Coordinator of the project Faro in Ragusa, Sicily.
Chapter 2
Girls and access to education

The number of children, teenagers and young people with no access to education has been steadily falling since 2000. According to the latest Millennium Goals report, significant results were achieved between 2000 and 2011, especially with regard to access to primary education: the number of children excluded from elementary schools has almost halved, falling from 102 million to 57 million\(^{11}\). However, the goal of education for all is still far from being achieved.

With the development of a new index, the main international organizations (in particular

\(^{11}\) The millennium development goals report 2015
UNESCO) have been able to further refine the available data on access to education. A task that has helped to highlight how the gender gap in access to education seems to have considerably reduced. "Historically, girls and young women were more excluded from educational routes - according to the report on Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education. However, today, non-attendance rates for girls in junior high school and high school are virtually identical to those for boys. While the gender gap in elementary school has gone from five percentage points in 2000 to less than two percentage points in 2015."

However, there is still a long way to go to achieve universal education. There are still a great many children and adolescents who cannot go to school, around 264 million worldwide. A huge number, equivalent to about a quarter of the European population. Half (about 130 million) are girls excluded from elementary school (32.4 million) or junior high school (29.8 million) or high school (68.7 million).

There are about 61 million children who have never been able to set foot in an elementary school classroom and just over half (32.4 million) are female. There are over 9 million girls living in sub-Saharan Africa who will never have the chance to learn to read or write. The gap is even more pronounced in countries in South-East Asia where 81% of the girls not in school today risk remaining excluded from education forever, compared with 42% of boys.

The causes of non-attendance at school
Poverty is the main cause of non-attendance at school. And it affects girls above all. A research carried out by UNESCO shows how in low and middle-income countries, the percentage of girls with no access to education always tends to exceed the rate for their male peers. In low-income countries, for example, 21.4% of girls cannot attend elementary school, compared to 16% of boys, and 41.3% of female pupils are excluded from junior high school, compared with 13% of boys.
35.7% of boys. Finally, high school education remains just a daydream for 66.4% of teenage girls, compared with 58.2% of their male counterparts. A gap that is virtually zero in high income countries.

**Out-of-school children, adolescents and youth: global status and trends**

About a third of the children who cannot go to school live in just six countries: Tanzania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Niger, Mali and Ethiopia. Poorer children - and out of these, girls in particular - are at high risk of exclusion from school. And the situation is getting worse in some cases. In Nigeria, for example, the number of poorer girls who have never attended school increased by 30% between 1999 and 2013, to stand at 76% of the total. There are great social inequalities within this large African country: only 4% of poorer girls living in the Northwestern regions can read, while the rate rises to 99% among the more affluent girls in the Southeast.

And then in many areas of the world, conflicts add to poverty. War is one of the main factors driving boys and girls away from school desks: 35% of all children who cannot attend elementary school (22 million), 25% of all teenagers who cannot attend junior high school (15 million) and 18% of all youths who cannot attend high school (26 million) live in countries scarred by wars and conflicts.

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17 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002503/250392E.pdf
18 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002460/246045e.pdf
Europe of the "Neets"

"Not (engaged) in Education, Employment or Training". "Neet": male and female youths who are not in education, employment or training for a new job. There is a small army of Neets in Europe around 16.9 million young people aged between 20 and 34. This equates to 18.3% of the population in that age group.

The phenomenon concerns girls in particular. If we compare the two genders, in fact, we find that almost a quarter of European girls (22.7%) in the 20-34 age group are "Neets", whilst the rate among males is 8.7%. A difference of 14 percentage points.

There are several causes that – according to Eurostat's analysis – may explain this gender disparity. First and foremost, there is the traditional view (with the consequent social pressures) that it is up to the women to do household chores and care for the family, whilst it is the man's responsibility to go out to work. In addition, there are the difficulties and pressures that young women must face in the world of work: the preference for hiring young men and the difficulties that many young women encounter in returning to work after having a baby. In short, there is a need to deal with the gender gap in pay and lack of job security by which female workers especially are disadvantaged.

And the gap between men and women "not in education or employment" increases with age: 2% in the 20-24 age bracket, rising to 9.8% among 25-29 year olds and peaking in the 30-34 age group (13.3%). This finding is connected, at least partly, "with the increasing number of women who are delaying pregnancy, the low number of men who take a career break to help their family and the various difficulties faced by women who want to combine their working life with a maternal role", says Eurostat.

**Italia** has a sad record both in terms of the absolute number of "Neets" and in terms of the incidence among females. In our country, the number of young people not in education or employment is significantly higher compared to other European countries: they represent 30.7% of those aged 20 to 34, compared with an average across the continent of 18.3%. And when it comes to the rate among females, it stands at 35% in Italy compared with a European average of 22.7%, with only Greece doing worse than us.

The last Istat report portrays an equally worrying situation, although with some improvement over the years of the crisis. In 2016, there were 2.2 million "Neet" young people in the 15-29 age bracket, 24.3% of the total (in 2015 they were 25.7%). Nearly 190,000 are mothers with young children. "The Neet condition continues to be more prevalent, not only among women, but also in

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20 The EU countries covered by the Eurostat investigation are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.
22 The Eurostat data does not take into consideration young people in the age group between 20 and 34 years since "almost all (90.2%) Europeans youth aged 15 to 19 continue to participate in some form of education and vocational training (formal or otherwise)
25 Unlike Eurostat, the data contained in the 2017 Istat Annual Report – The Situation in the Country, takes into consideration the age group between 15 and 29 years.
the South and among young people who still live in the family of origin (which are three quarters of the total)," according to the summary of the report.

**STEM: a complex relationship with girls**

Italian (though not exclusively) female students do not like science. In Europe, less than one out of five computer science graduates are female. The "Pisa" (*Program for international student assessment*) investigations by OSCE shows that males are more likely to imagine themselves as scientists or engineers than females. Yet, "STEM" (an acronym combining the first letters of the words *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*, and which refers to the sum of all scientific and mathematical subjects) is one of the areas of study that provides most employment opportunities at the end of the study period.

"Male and female students continue to choose different careers. The adherence to society’s expectations, gender dependent stereotypes and the lack of role models, continues to steer the choices of girls away from STEM" says, in the introduction, Martin W Bauer, professor of the Department of Psychology and Social Science of the London School of Economics and author of *Why Europe’s girls aren’t studying STEM*, sponsored by Microsoft. A research involving 11,500 girls in 12 European countries and which turns some stereotypes around.

For example, the cliché which sees boys as "naturally gifted" in mathematics and science, while girls would be more into humanities. The research claims instead that the interest in STEM in European girls arises around age 11, and later decreases dramatically between 15 and 16 years of age. Similarly, in Italy, the interest starts to drop after age 17 and shows a downward peak around age 26. These are two crucial moments in a person’s life: the years in which you must choose whether to enroll at the University (and, if so, what subjects to study) and the time of entering the workforce. Only 12.6% of Italian female students, in fact, embark on a university career connected with STEM.

This gap could pose a problem for the future of Europe that, by 2020, may have to deal with a frightening lack of skilled engineers (about 900,000 as estimated by the European Commission).

"If we don’t help girls to get passionate about "STEM", we will never be able to close this gap," states the report.

But what are the factors that lead girls to lose interest in science? Many girls believe that this line of work is still lacking in equal opportunities. A 66.1% of girls admitted they **would feel more at ease pursuing a Stem profession** if they could be certain that in these professions women would be given **the same workplace treatment** as men.

Other elements are the lack of female role models (43.8% associates male figures with this profession), the lack of practical experience during their studies, a limited understanding of the practical applications showing what could actually be accomplished through this type of educational and career path.

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26 [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2017/05/Sintesi.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2017/05/Sintesi.pdf)
Chapter 3
Child Marriages

"Child marriage not only puts a stop to girls' hopes and dreams, but it also hampers efforts to end poverty." Quentin Wodon is a World Bank researcher, co-author of an important study on the economic impact of child marriages. Because compelling a girl to marry does not only cause her harm, but it damages the entire community in which she lives. And even the economy of entire nations. "Ending this practice is not only the morally right thing to do but also the economically smart thing to do" concludes Wodon.”

The research "Economic Impact of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report” was carried out by the World Bank and the International Centre for Research on Women, taking into account a long series of economic and social indicators of countries where the phenomenon of early marriages is

29 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-worldbank-childmarriage-idUSKBN19I1PS
particularly extensive\textsuperscript{31}. The research aims at estimating the economic impact of early marriages, highlighting how it is possible to obtain significant benefits, (also) for the economies of the countries involved, by eliminating this practice.

For example, imagine that in 2015 the last marriage was celebrated between a young girl and an older man, what could happen in 2030? The first - and most significant - consequence would be a global reduction in the fertility rate of women and, therefore, a significant drop in population. According to World Bank estimates, this could lead to savings of 566 billion (by 2030) dollars due to a reduction in welfare spending in single countries.

In Niger (the country with the highest prevalence of early marriages) as a result of a reduction in fertility rate, the population may be reduced by 5\% by 2030. With a saving of 1.7 billion dollars welfare spending. While in Ethiopia the benefit would be even greater, i.e. 4.8 billion dollars. In Nepal, however, the figure should be about one billion. Other benefits would be reflected from the decrease in child mortality and acute malnutrition. Again, in Niger for these two causes, they would save themselves 34 and 8 million dollars respectively.

While it is true that rescued lives and healthy development are difficult to monetize, World Bank researchers have added savings resulting from the drop in health spending with the larger gains these children might achieve as adults: the total amounts to about 98 billion in 2030 in the countries examined.

According to the report, “Ending early marriages can make a significant contribution to alleviating poverty, improving health conditions at both the individual and the general population level, increasing the productivity and growth opportunities for economic development”\textsuperscript{32}. A number of important benefits stemming primarily from the decline in birth rate, the improvement of the health conditions of newborns and neo-mothers, and a reduction in childhood malnutrition rate.

Ending early pregnancies would considerably lower the number of children per woman, with an average fertility rate decrease of 11\%. Ranging from peaks at 7\% in Egypt to 18\% in Bangladesh. Eliminating early marriages would also dramatically reduce early pregnancies, as well as all the negative consequences affecting the health of the mother and child: children who are born from very young mothers, are in fact more exposed to the risk of dying at birth or within five years of age.

According to World Bank estimates, eliminating early marriages would save the life -by 2030 - of two million children who could manage to survive beyond five years of age, while another 3.6 million would not suffer from acute malnutrition.

These benefits add to the increase in school attendance: a higher education rate offers these girls more opportunities to find a more profitable job. "For the 15 countries being addressed, maintaining 2015 as a reference year, we can calculate that these missing girls’ earnings due to early marriage are about 26 billion dollars," according to the report. Only in Bangladesh, putting an end to early marriages would generate about 4.8 billion dollars a year in the form of women’s additional gains. While in Nigeria, every year 7.6 billion dollars goes up in smoke due to early marriages.

The Diffusion of a Phenomenon

The phenomenon of early marriages - unfortunately – has spread in many countries around the world and has taken alarming dimensions. It is estimated that every year around 15 million children

\textsuperscript{31}The “core” of 15 countries under consideration for most indicators are: Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and Zambia.

\textsuperscript{32}“Economic Impacts of child marriage: global synthesis report”, June 2017, World Bank
and girls under 18 are married. One every two seconds. It is estimated that today around 720 million women are married before the legal age. More than one in three (about 250 million) were younger than 15 years old on the day they pronounced the fateful "I do".

The incidence of early marriages is declining in terms of percentages, as a result of the policies implemented in recent years, yet absolute numbers are recording a worrying increase. A paradoxical situation, partly determined by the demographic growth of the population. Unicef and Unfpa (the United Nations Population Fund) estimate that if there are no changes in the current trend, the number of baby brides will continue to increase in the coming years to 950 million by 2030 and by 2050 to one billion and 200 million baby brides, half of them in the Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

Wars, political instability and natural calamities (earthquakes, floods, etc.) cause an increase in early marriages. It is no coincidence that among the ten countries where the rate of early marriages is higher, as many as seven can be considered "fragile states". And when humanitarian crises, wars break out or when an earthquake buries entire villages, the risks for little girls increases further. The case of Syria is probably the most well-known one: in the country, before the outbreak of civil war, early marriages were relatively rare (around 11% of women living in the country had married before 18). Millions of Syrians have fled to neighboring countries where there has been an increase in early marriages among refugees. In Jordan, between 2011 and 2014, the percentage of recorded marriages in which one of the two spouses (usually the future wife) is underage has risen from 12% to 32%.

Parents who are pushing their daughters, who are still adolescents to marry, do so - in many cases - thinking that a husband can protect her from violence (especially in warfare) and ensure her of the best living conditions.

**Child Brides, by Law**

Unicef considers "early marriage" (child marriage) as legal or informal unions involving at least one minor. When a female child - or more rarely a male child - gets married under the legal age, we are faced with a violation of their fundamental right.

Several international conventions have established this, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw), ratified by 187 countries (except Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Palau, Tonga and the United States). In Article 16, the convention clearly states that all women must have the same right as men to "freely choose who to marry and enter into marriage only in the state of freedom and full consensus".

Unfortunately, it is not so. First of all, many countries have determined that marriage is legal also for girls under the age of 18. This is the case, for example, in Saudi Arabia, where a minimum age of marriage is not established. In Iran a girl can legally marry at 13 years, while Mali and Kenya set the minimum age for marriage at age 16. In Sudan, Muslim girls are allowed to marry when they reach puberty while non-Muslim girls may be married as early as 13 years old.


34 Niger, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, South Sudan, Guinea and Bangladesh are considered "fragile states" by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (www.oecd.org)


36 [https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html](https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html)


And even in many countries where the bar is set at age 18, there are a number of loopholes that allow marriages to children and girls who are still underage if there is parental consent, permission from a court or a religious authority. This is the case, for example, in the United States where, between 2000 and 2010, in total legality, there were at least 167 thousand marriages in which one of the partners (usually the bride) was underage in the 38 states where this practice is legal. It is, however, plausible to imagine that the actual number is higher, in fact according to the most reliable estimates it could be about 250,000.

At a global level, however, in recent years there has been a general rise in the minimum age for marriages. In 2008 in Egypt, for example, it had been brought up to 18 years. After the Arab Revolution of 2011, several proposals were made to bring the minimum age to under the age of 18 (as low as 9 years), but thanks to the mobilization of the National Council for Women these proposals have been abandoned.

In this context of raising the overall minimum age, we note a very important and troubling exception: the Bangladesh parliament has, in fact, approved a proposal to amend the "Child Marriage Restraint Act" which allows girls under 18 to marry in some specific cases. This deals with a significant and important precedent because it is one of the countries where there is a very high number of early marriages involving little girls.

41 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/opinion/sunday/it-was-forced-on-me-child-marriage-in-the-us.html?_r=1&__utm_source=Girls+Not+Brides+Newsletters+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=eb4432c056-CM+in+the+news+3%2F06%2F17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a83e20c2e1-eb4432c056-397976973
42 http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/egypt/
This year Terre des Hommes has joined Girls Not Brides, an international coalition that brings together more than 700 civil society organizations committed to countering the practice of early marriages and supporting baby brides. Coalition members are present on all continents and share the principle that every little girl has the right to choose for herself the life she desires and the conviction that the entire society will benefit from that, i.e. no more baby brides.

The activity of the organizations that are part of Girls Not Brides ranges from raising public awareness to field actions, to advocacy work at a national and international level, to enforce laws to protect girls and to launch policies and programmes that can effectively change the lives of millions of girls around the world. Terre des Hommes, in all its projects, pays special attention to the needs of little girls, by trying to prevent them from leaving school and counteracting such habit, thus postponing weddings up to the legal age, also raising awareness among families and local institutions. An example is the work we are doing in Burkina Faso, in the centre "Etoiles du Burkina", which opened October 11th, 2016, on the occasion of the United Nations Children's Rights Day. The centre, located on the outskirts of North Ouagadougou, an area with earth houses, with no access to water or light, it's a women's oasis that offers support to young women with no education, but with a strong desire to succeed. We offer them professional training, to prevent them from marrying under duress, as a survival strategy. Our “girls” also participated in popular mobilizations against early marriages, widespread in the country, along with students and several institutional and civil society partners.
Yemen: 12 Year Old Brides

Given in marriage to feed the whole family during the war or just to make some money, as is the case in public employees' families living in the North, that have not been getting any salary for more than 10 months. In Yemen, today, an 11-year-old girl can be married to a 25-year-old man, even to get a blood transfusion to save her mother's life: like what happened to Fairuz Ahmed Haider, living in the Khamer refugee camp and coming from the city of Sadaa, massively bombed by the Gulf Countries Coalition. According to Unicef Yemen, the Yemen war, especially in the northern areas, affected by more intense bombing, blockade of humanitarian goods and aids, suspension of salaries and the presence of the Houti rebels' militias, increased by 20%, the number of early marriages. The average age of child brides ranges from 8 to 15 years, with an average of around 12-13, just barely out of puberty.

One of the most common reasons, besides the use of the daughters' dowry for daily survival, is the concern that very young girls may be victims of militia men, be kidnapped (the cases are in the hundreds), receive a proposal of forced marriage and threats to the families by the warlords. Like Eman, daughter of Mohammed Abdullah al-Zawani who had to "surrender" her twelve year old daughter to Houti militias following a kidnapping. The lack of human rights observers and the closure of international organisation and local NGO offices make it difficult at present not only to report but also to detect cases and occurrences.

In Yemen, a bill establishing a minimum age of 18 years for marriage was presented on 27 April 2014 by Justice Minister Mohammad Makhfaji to Prime Minister Mohammad Basindawa and was added to the new Constitution in January 2015, pending the previously announced decree from the president of the republic. But the coup d'etat of the Houthi militia, which had already expressed a negative opinion at the National Dialogue Conference on the compliance of the law in the interpretation of Ja'fari Shiite sharia jurisprudence, and the subsequent conflict, did not allow ratification of the law. Therefore, at present, the country still has no law regulating access to marriage, and war can only make this social plague a more frequent and severe occurrence.

Laura Silvia Battaglia
Chapter 4
Early pregnancies and other threats for the girls’ health

Adolescence is a crucial moment of transition. Huge changes take place in a few years, that can mark the future of girls. Adolescence can also be a very dangerous time. As a matter of fact, every day about 3,000 boys and girls die, who are aged between 10 and 19 years. A total of 1.2 million deaths per year (2015)44. Two thirds of these deaths were recorded in low and medium income countries in Africa (45%) and Southeast Asia (26%)45.

Such deaths result from easily preventable events: road accidents, easily curable or preventable diseases, HIV and, in the case of girls, complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. Yet, as Flavia Bustreo, Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) says, “teenagers have been totally excluded from national health protection programmes for decades”46.

A recent WHO study carried out in cooperation with several international agencies (Unaids, Unfpa, Unesco, Unicef, UnWomen and World Bank), highlights that the causes of mortality are different according to gender and age range47. Among younger girls (10-14 years) the main cause of mortality is respiratory infections (e.g. pneumonia), followed by diarrhea and meningitis similarly to their male peers. Mortality rates

45 http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/255415/1/9789241512343-eng.pdf?ua=1
47 http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/255415/1/9789241512343-eng.pdf?ua=1
increase significantly among older girls (15-19 years), the main causes being complications related to pregnancy and childbirth (hemorrhage, sepsis, labor, consequences of unsafe abortions). In this age group, we have 10.1 deaths per 100,000 live births. With a peak in medium-low-income countries in Africa, where the mortality rate rises to 35.7 per 100,000. The second cause of death among girls is suicide (both intentional ones and deaths due to self-inflicted wounds, ed) with a ratio of 9.6 per 100,000 deaths.

**Early pregnancies, serious risks for girls**
Globally, 11% of all children given birth to in the world have a mum aged 15 to 19. In 95% of cases, it deals with little girls and girls living in medium and low income countries. In 2016, 21 million pregnancies were recorded among girls aged 15 to 19 living in developing countries. It is estimated that almost half of the cases are unwanted pregnancies.

Girls - often baby-brides who are forced to marry older men - do not have the means to avoid pregnancy and do not know how to do it: in many countries there are no sexual education programmes, counseling centres (public and private) are difficult to reach, contraceptives (pill or condom) are expensive or difficult to find. In addition, within the couple, the young brides do not have sufficient contractual power to refuse unwanted sexual intercourses or urge the partner to use contraceptives of any kind.

Early pregnancies are a serious health hazard. First of all for the mother, but also for the baby. Every year, about 70,000 girls die due to childbirth and complications related to pregnancy. In addition, the risk of developing disabling pathologies such as obstetrician fistula is much higher for adolescents than for adult women.

Early pregnancies often have adverse effects on the infants as well. The younger the mothers, the greater the risk for the children. When the mom is under twenty years of age, her baby is 50% more likely to die before birth or during the first few weeks of life, compared to babies whose mothers are aged between 20 and 29.

**Unsafe abortions**
Every year, 3.2 million girls under 20 undergo an abortion in countries where this practice is illegal or unsafe. Nearly half of these interventions take place in Sub-Saharan Africa (1,400,000), where at least 36,000 women and girls die each year due to the consequences of such interventions and where more than one million suffer from the physical consequences of these interventions for their entire life.

It is estimated that around 25% of the world's population lives in the 66 countries, where abortion is only allowed if the mother's life is at risk. Among them, four countries (El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and Malta) forbid abortion under all circumstances; while other countries allow abortion in case of rape (Brazil) or incest. Other 59 countries (where 13.8% of the world's population live) allow abortion only if it is necessary to protect the mother's health.

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48 Ibid
51 [https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-meeting-contraceptive-needs-of-adolescents#10](https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-meeting-contraceptive-needs-of-adolescents#10)
52 "Motherhood in childhood", Unfpa 2013
54 "Motherhood in childhood", Unfpa 2013
56 At the time of the dossier drawing up (August 2017), in Chile, the decriminalization of abortion is being discussed in case of mother’s life endangerment, serious fetal malformation and pregnancy resulting from rape.
57 [https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/AbortionMap2014.PDF](https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/AbortionMap2014.PDF)
El Salvador is one of the four countries in the world where abortion is banned under all circumstances. Even when the mother’s life is in danger or if the woman has been a victim of rape or incest. This is the most restrictive legislation in the world, already stigmatized in February 2011 by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, because it violates the human rights of women and teenagers.

One might say that it deals with another form of violence against girls in that country. El Salvador, in fact, is a country where the levels of violence are reportedly alarming. The latest available data indicates that the main victims of sexual violence in the country are girls: in 2010, 2,079 cases of rape were reported, in 67% of cases the victims were under 17 years of age. Those crimes go mostly unpunished and often result in unwanted pregnancies.

**AIDS**

Between 2005 and 2015, the HIV mortality rate decreased by 50%, while the number of new cases decreased by 18% over the same period. A global improvement from which girls are yet excluded.

Girls and young women between 15 and 24 are particularly exposed to the risk of contracting the HIV virus. Although women in this age range represent only 11% of the global population, it is right among those very young and young women that 20% of new infections are recorded globally. And the data becomes even more alarming in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 25% of new infections are developed by women aged 15 to 24, although those accounts only for 17% of the population of the region.

In absolute numbers, every year about 250,000 new HIV infections are recorded among adolescents (datum dating back to 2015), 65% of which are girls. In eight out of ten cases, it deals with girls living in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, there are about 1.8 million teenagers (10-19 years old) living with the HIV virus. The majority (56%) are girls.

AIDS causes tens of thousands of deaths every year. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that AIDS causes 17 deaths per 100,000 adolescents. And girls are the main victims of this epidemic: in 2015 Aids was the eighth cause of death among girls, with about 44,000 deaths registered in the age group from 10 to 19.

The particular vulnerability to HIV infections of girls is due to several factors. There are "biological" reasons that make them more vulnerable than their male peers. But the spread of HIV among young women is associated mainly with external factors: early marriages, violence, sexual abuse (often with older partners), trafficking, poor access to health services and contraception.

**Family planning**

Investing in contraception and family planning helps to protect the girls’ health, first of all, avoiding contagion from sexually transmitted diseases, as well as postponing the time of pregnancy and childbirth, thus protecting the health of the youngest ones.

According to the estimates of the Guttmacher Institute, about 15 million teenagers use modern contraceptive methods. But other 23 million young women do not have that possibility at all. "Improving services for young women, who already use contraceptive methods, and extending them to those who currently do not have access to such services would cost 770 million dollars a year in Sub-Saharan Africa, at a time when the budget allocated to family planning is not enough to cover even the needs of current users."

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62 Ibidem
63 [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/255415/1/9789241512343-eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/255415/1/9789241512343-eng.pdf?ua=1)
year," according to the researchers of the Guttmacher Institute. Including girls who do not have access to contraceptives in developing countries would cost 222 million dollars (41 million in Africa, 61 million in Asia and 119 million in Latin America).

Giving girls the tools and information they need to avoid unwanted pregnancies, would help reduce their number (in the age range from 15 to 19) by about 6 million each year. Avoided pregnancies that would prevent 3.2 million abortions and 5.600 deaths among the youngest mothers 64.

Supporting young mums in Italy
For the last ten years, the San Paolo Hospital in Milan has offered a unique service in Italy, the Adolescent Parenting Programmes (SAGA), was created following the agreement between the ASST Santi Paolo and Carlo di Milano (the neuropsychiatry unit for infants and adolescents) and the ATS della Città Metropolitana di Milano, with the scientific contribution of the University of Milano-Bicocca. "We are the only public centre in Italy that deals with pregnancy in adolescence," explains Margherita Moioli, neuropsychomotricity therapist of the developmental age and representative of the adolescent parenting programmes at the hospital. "We provide support for these young mothers and their babies. They are high risk girls, however, if properly monitored and supported, they can indeed take on their role as mothers, while avoiding problems with their babies."

In order to understand the full extent of the phenomenon, some data is needed. In 2007 (the year of SAGA kickoff), among the babies born, 21,656 had mothers under 21 in Italy. In 2008 the number rose to 25,499, to gradually decrease to 21,237 in 2013, 20,290 in 2014 and 18,446 in 2015. This phenomenon is most concentrated in Lombardy, Campania and Sicily: in 2013, figures in these three regions alone reached nearly 10,000. There is not much difference between Italian and foreign baby mums. The ratio is about 50:50.

In Lombardy, the number of children born to mothers under 21 is particularly high. There were 1,663 births in 2002 with the trend increasing up until 2008 when it peaked at 2,416. Over the following few years, the number remained at around two thousand births per year, then soared to 2,744 in 2014 and 2,581 in 2015.

But what is the background these young mums come from? "At the root of it all is a family struggling to meet the needs of a 13-15 year old girl," explains Margherita Moioli. It is therefore not just a matter of poverty or social marginalization. "Our experience tells us that these girls come from backgrounds where they have been mistreated or neglected by their family. In addition, the number of young mums turning to our service and reporting that they have experienced mistreatment, serious abuse or sexual violence has increased from 30% in 2014 to 57%. It is a very high figure that we are concerned about."

Another worrying factor is the rise of baby mums in Lombardy. Since 2012, there has been an increase in pregnancies among girls under 15. "According to national data, there is a reduction in all age groups. Except for the under 14s," she explains. The number of pregnancies registered among under 14s throughout Italy has increased from 3 in 2007 to 13 in 2015. Though these are extremely small numbers, this is a countertrend compared to all other age groups. It means we already have a problem in middle schools and this requires an intervention."

Despite the difficulties, a positive solution is possible. "Taking care of a thirteen or fourteen year old new mother means having three patients: mum, dad (who is often just as young, ed) and the little one. All three must be supported to ensure that they can resume their lives without the pregnancy becoming a tragedy, but a source of growth without traumas instead." Support for

64 https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-meeting-contraceptive-needs-of-adolescents#10
young parents starts with basic elements, such as interpreting the child's tears or gaze, in order to understand the real needs of the child. But it is also important to support the new parents' schooling. "We usually see between 20 and 30 girls a year. During the first six months of 2017, we have been monitoring 15."

Taking care of these very young mums makes it possible to prevent things from turning nasty. And the approach adopted by psychologists and operators at SAGA has achieved good results these years. "None of the girls we have supported has ever mistreated or been violent with her baby; a sign that it is possible to break the spiral of abuse," says Margherita Moioli. "Another goal we manage to achieve is to prevent recurrences: young mothers often fall pregnant again shortly afterward. This is a very dangerous situation that puts these girls at risk of depression or deciding to abort. The girls we have helped do not fall pregnant again, at least not for two or three years after the first pregnancy. And these pregnancies are wanted and planned."
Chapter 5
Forced recruitment of girls

In recent years, international organisations, governments and NGOs have made huge efforts to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers. Efforts that have only partially produced the desired results. There is no accurate data, but it is estimated that the number of children forced to handle a weapon is somewhere between 250 and 300 thousand. Most of them are aged between 14 and 18, but there are also several cases of enlistment among even younger groups. 30% of them are girls and young women.

These baby soldiers are asked to perform a wide range of tasks. First of all, to participate in offensive and/or defensive actions (participate in fights, place mines and explosives and perform reconnaissance), carry out logistic and support tasks, as carriers or to accomplish housekeeping chores. Furthermore, girls and young women are often forced into abuse and violence or become the "wives" of the older fighters.

Compared to governing forces, more often than not it is the opposition, paramilitary groups and non-governmental militias recruiting girls into the ranks. "Although not so visible, girls are recruited by armed groups much more often than you’d think," says researcher Myriam Denov in her essay dedicated to Sierra Leone girl soldiers. Between 1990 and 2003, girls and young women were enlisted in 55 different countries and were actively used in fighting in conflicts involving 38 countries. Although the incidence of female soldiers varies according to the geographical area, it is estimated that they make up 10 to 30% of the total. In conflicts in Africa, girls account for 30 to 40% of baby fighters.

65 https://d21zrvtkxtd6ae.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/2017/01/13125708/12_bambiniSoldato__1_.pdf
66 Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Zimbabwe.
67 Myriam Denov "Child Soldiers. Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front"
The girl soldiers of Congo
The "invisibility" of girl soldiers continues - and perhaps is even strengthened - when demobilisation programmes are activated.
From this point of view, the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is exemplary. According to the data provided by MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) out of the 8,546 children removed from ranks and interviewed between January 2009 and November 2015, only 600 were female (7% of the total). Yet the percentage of young female soldiers in the country is much higher (30-40%) \(^{68}\). Numbers that show just how much efforts to demobilise child soldiers "neglect" the girls.
"It is difficult for girls to escape, especially when they are pregnant or have children," reads the report from MONUSCO. "Some feel obliged to remain among the fighters in order to avoid the social stigma that would follow them back to their communities." \(^{69}\)

Child Soldiers International interviewed 150 girls who abandoned the fighting groups in the DRC. About one third (54) stated that they had received no form of assistance (medical, material, psychological or socio-economic). In addition, there are no programmes for the reintegration of girls and no dedicated professional courses. And, in many respects, there seems to be absolutely no awareness that the needs of girls who have laid down their weapons are very different from those of their male peers.

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\(^{68}\) "What the girls say. Improving practices for the demobilisation and reintegration of girls associated with armed forces and armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo", Child soldiers international, 2017

Chapter 6
Victims of trafficking

One in five victims of trafficking worldwide is a girl. The data recorded by the UNODC\textsuperscript{70}, the United Nations agency that deals with drugs and human trafficking, has remained constant since 2011: very young and underage girls represent 20\% of victims of trafficking globally and together with adult women, makeup 71\% of the total. The UNODC estimates that trafficking affects 2.4 million people (in 2012, the latest year for which data is available), 80\% of whom are exploited in prostitution. But exploitation is not only of a sexual nature: men, women and children are sold and exploited as a source of labor too, often reduced to conditions of real slavery. Sometimes they even become victims of organ trafficking.

Over the past few years, child trafficking has been gradually increasing. In 2004, children represented 13\% of the total (10\% girls, 3\% boys) and 27\% in 2009 (17\% girls, 10\% boys) before leaping to 34\% (21\% girls, 13\% boys) in 2011. It was only in 2014 that a slight decrease was recorded (28\%).

Child trafficking is especially prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa (62\% of all victims are children) and Central America (64\%). But whilst in the case of the former, the victims are mainly boys (exploited for labor, as child soldiers or for begging) in Central America and the Caribbean, the victims are mainly girls, destined primarily for sexual exploitation.

In addition, at a global level, there is a new form of trafficking emerging that affects teenagers and young women who are sold to handle arranged marriages. This kind of trafficking had been reported on a sporadic basis in the past – according to the UNODC report – but is now emerging.

\textsuperscript{70} http://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html
as one of the prevalent forms. In Southeast Asia, it often results in forced marriages or marriages that take place without the future wife's consent\textsuperscript{71}.

A new record in China
For the first time since 2011, China is back on the United States' blacklist of countries that do not comply with the minimum standards for tackling human trafficking.\textsuperscript{72} A resounding failure that has given great prominence to the publication of the 2017 edition of the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report.

It is estimated that 0.25\% of the Chinese population, females and minors especially, are at risk of trafficking.

Soliciting takes place mostly in rural areas, where there are about 58 million so-called "left-behind children": children who are left on their own, without adults to look after them. They are the children of China's 180 million domestic migrants who leave rural areas and head for the cities. These boys and girls are the traffickers' main target. They supply the Chinese prostitution market, a market that knows no national borders. In fact, according to the US Department of State's research, Chinese prostitutes, even very young girls, follow adult males moving to get work, particularly in Africa. Besides sexual exploitation, there is also labor exploitation: young girls are often forced to work exhausting shifts in the country's businesses. The most famous case dates back to 2011 when the controversy broke out over the labor exploitation of underage students at the Foxconn factories, the company that used to supply Apple. Shifts on the Chinese technology giant's assembly line were passed off as educational training\textsuperscript{73}.

According to the Bloomberg leader writer, Adam Minter, the trafficking phenomenon has clear political roots. The "one-child" policy was enforced in China up until 2016. This was designed to keep births under control and thus limit the country's demographic boom. This measure, together with Chinese families' traditional preference for sons, has created an enormous gender disparity caused by the high rate of selective abortions and female infanticide.

In countries where there are no evident changes, there are slightly more boys born than girls (102-106 boys for every 100 girls). In China, however, 118 boys are born for every 100 girls, rising to as many as 125 boys for every 100 girls in provinces such as Hainan and Fujian. As a result of this


\textsuperscript{72} https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/

\textsuperscript{73} https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/forced-student-labour-china-apple
gender selection policy, there are 900,000 "additional" boys born in China every year\textsuperscript{74}. Men will have difficulty finding a wife, the "demand" for which is already fueling the "bride market", often with victims of trafficking.

According to a 2011 study, the average cost of a dowry (which the groom's family pays to the bride's family) increased by 70% between the Sixties and Nineties as a direct result of the shortage of young women of marrying age\textsuperscript{75}. The United Nations report cites the case of two men who had bought a young girl for 1,500 dollars to ensure they could have heirs. The "hunger" for brides leads men to pay up to 64,000 dollars to ensure themselves of a wife, even an extremely young one\textsuperscript{76}.

Beijing is not just the point of departure for trafficking victims, it is also a destination and transit hub for this thriving market. In particular, young victims arrive in China from North Korea, Thailand and Southeast Asia, Taiwan and Mongolia. Ganbayagakh Geleg, one of the "heroes" of the 2017 report, works right on the Sino-Mongolian border. Through her Mongolian Gender Equality Centre, she has helped to reduce the number of victims of trafficking - including the very young - entering China.

China has some good results on arresting traffickers: according to the local authorities, in 2015 there were 1,932 suspected traffickers who were locked up, including 1,362 convicted for exploitation of women and girls.

\textsuperscript{74} Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications, 2012, UNFPA http://bit.ly/1OHto6x


\textsuperscript{76} https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-06-28/the-real-source-of-china-s-human-trafficking-problem
Chapter 7
Migrant Girls

"The future of the world will be determined by the destiny of 10-year-old girls. Ten years old is the beginning of adolescence when a person sees his or her chances expanding - or shrinking. As these girls feel closer to puberty, they may feel the need of greater independence and to explore new interests. Or they may be increasingly seen as servants and babysitters, or as traded goods. " At the same age, very different destinies, essentially determined by the latitude of their place of birth, the family’s economic conditions and the surrounding environment. The United Nations Population Fund UNPA writes that in a focus on the situation of the 125 million girls born in 2006 around the world77.

89% of them live in underdeveloped regions. One in five lives in the 48 countries that the UN defines as developing countries. In these contexts, a desire to build opportunities for a different lifestyle is born. Even away from their own families, if necessary. Often in contexts where the border between trafficking and forced migration is very subtle and difficult to detect.

In this framework, the growing phenomenon of little girls migrating without family in tow is rooted. This is a difficult phenomenon to deal with because the statistical items are very partial. The main databases, in fact, do not distinguish minors by sex, thus denying the gender issue. Together with it, also one aspect of the problem, i.e. the suspicion that behind the increase in the global numbers there is the growing exploitation of little girls and girls in the prostitution business.

Arriving alone in Europe

The Eurostat portal records 63,290 asylum applications submitted in 2016 by foreign unaccompanied minors. Within this small army of fleeing children and boys, females represent a net minority: approximately 6,000, less than 10% of the total. But their number is growing. Most sun-seekers applied for asylum in Germany (3,200), followed by Holland (370), Greece (315) and Italy (290). Most of them are Syrian (1,575) and Afghan (740). Among the small Syrian asylum seekers, 1,115 have requested asylum in Germany, 180 in Greece, 35 in Austria and just as many in the Netherlands. In Germany, there are also Afghan little girls (460), who otherwise have chosen Greece (45) and Austria (70).

The Case of Nigerian Minors

Italy, like the rest of Europe, is increasingly becoming a destination for migrant girls. Throughout 2016, out of a total of 17,373 foreign unaccompanied minors recorded, females were at 1,165. In the first five months of 2017, the Ministry of Labor has estimated almost the same: 1,123, 6.9% of the total.

Data from 2016 indicates that 73.6% of the total is between 16 and 17 years old (73.6%). In 2017, six out of ten girls who came were over the age of 17.

The first country of origin is Nigeria (534), which is in constant increase. Eritreans (225) and Albanians (100), who resumed to using boats as in the 1990s, following in the ranking. The high number of young Nigerian women among the migrants reaching Italy on a rubber boat departed from Libya, is a consolidated and steadily growing figure, both in the case of women (who were about 5,000 in 2015, over 11,000 in 2016) and unaccompanied minors (mostly females, that increased from 900 to 3,040).

"The World Organization for Migration (OIM) estimates that about 80% of Nigerian migrants arriving by sea in 2016 are likely to be trafficking victims destined for sexual exploitation in Italy or in other countries of the European Union," states a recently released report. Oim also denounces "the significant and worrying increase in adolescent trafficking victims”. Many of these girls at the time of disembarkation declare themselves adults, following the directions of the traffickers: "This way, these girls will be placed in adult accommodation facilities, where it will be easier to contact their traffickers who will pick them up with greater ease”.

"The trafficking of human beings is involving girls of increasingly lower age, in our protective homes, the trafficking victims are little girls barely over eighteen, but between 19 and 16 years there is, however, a difference”, an alarm is launched in an interview with Vita da Liviana Marelli, National Childhood Coordinator's National Reception Centre (CNCA).

Also Save the Children highlights the progressive drop in the age of young Nigerian trafficking victims: "They are getting younger, scarcely educated and even poorer. These are mostly girls between the ages of 15 and 17, with an increasing share of girls between the ages of 13 and 14". Recruitment takes place in Benin City, rural areas and remote villages of the Anambra, Delta and Lagos states.

The trip for these girls is a nightmare of abuse and violence, many are forced to prostitute themselves in Libya in the so-called connection house to start repaying the huge debt (20-50

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78 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/8016696/3-11052017-AP-EN.pdf/30ca2206-0db9-4076-a681-e069a4bc5290
81 Ibidem
thousand euros) contracted at the time of departure and which is often initiated by a magical rite, known as juju or voodoo. Unlike what happened in the nineties and in the early 2000s (when girls came mainly via air), traffickers today "confuse" them with the migrants leaving Libya. They give them clear instructions from the start so that they can run away from the reception centres at the first available opportunity.

Once they arrive in Italy, it is time to repay the debt. Girls are forced to prostitute themselves for long periods of time (three to seven years) "and in order to earn more often, they agree to have unprotected sexual intercourses. Their vulnerability is all the more exasperated in places of less visible prostitution, peripheral areas where the high risk of aggression is often associated with a greatly depreciated tariff "83. In some parts of Italy (e.g. Bonifica del Tronto, in Abruzzo), young Nigerians are forced to prostitute themselves for 5 or 10 euros per performance.

83 Ibidem
**#Indifesa Stories**

**Blessing**
Blessing is 17 years old and arrived in Italy in 2017 after a journey, during which she saw many people die and experienced an indiscriminate exercise of violence that, in case of women, often features the connotations of rape. She comes from Benin City and left Nigeria by the decision of her mother, the only family member she is in touch with. The childhood of the girl is in fact marked by extreme poverty and very violent conflicts between her parents, who finally decided to divorce. For this reason, Blessing has not seen her father and brother for a long time, she also lost any possibility to get in touch with them. After her father's abandonment, the economic conditions of the family worsened and, growing, Blessing had to give up his plans to become a beautician, having to help her mother with the daily maintenance. It was right the mother, who entrusted her to a madame, that against payment of a large sum of money managed to get her to Italy, aiming at improving the family's economic conditions and, in this case, unlike other ones, where the will to start the girl into prostitution is not explicit, everyone was aware of this intention. The mother is, in fact, exerting a considerable pressure on Blessing for her to prostitute and it is very difficult for the girl to endure both the pressure and the distress, resulting from breaking the covenant sealed with the juju, that is usually associated with terrible consequences.

Terre des Hommes met Blessing in Syracuse within a protection programme that is offering her the opportunity to get out of trafficking, given her strong motivation and her willingness to find alternative ways to repay the debt. The team of Terre des Hommes, in cooperation with the operators of its centre, are supporting her in getting over the strong feelings of distress and guilt for failing to accomplish the heavy family mandate, helping her to plan a different future.

**Gift**
Gift is 17 years old and, when she arrived in Sicily in a reception centre for unaccompanied minors, the team of Terre des Hommes immediately spotted her due to her state of extreme prostration and some typical behaviors suggesting a remarkable uneasiness. Gift in fact is pregnant and when she arrived she stated immediately that she wanted to abort, unable to do so because the times prescribed by the law were already overdue. She states that the child is the result of violence, as she does not have a partner and she is sure that none of her clients is the father. Since the age of 14, Gift has lived in Libya where she prostituted to repay the debt to her madame, who had envisaged a journey to Europe and a better job with the opportunity to study. Gift was a good student and she wanted to continue her studies in Nigeria. But she was unable to do so after the death of her mother and the abandonment of her father, who was never interested in her maintenance and that of her six younger brothers. To take care of them, Gift left the school and started to engage in various working activities, often in different regions of Nigeria, until a distant relative introduced her to the madame.

When she finally had repaid the debt, Gift had to leave Libya in a state of extreme confusion and danger. Following the armed conflict between some militia bands that led to the almost complete destruction of the garage district housing the brothels, she was seized and locked in a detention house, repeatedly beaten and raped for several months. She was released because she was pregnant and then she decided to undertake the crossing to Italy.

At the moment she is still in the reception centre, tortured by the thought of her brothers in Nigeria, who have been entrusted to their uncles and grandparents, but that she fears cannot live dignitously.

**Beki**
Beki is 17 and comes from Nigeria. She is a very respectful and reserved girl, who spent much of her adolescence in Mali, where she was sexually exploited for at least three years. A distant relative introduced Beki to a madame who promised her a course of study and a job abroad. For that
Beki’s parents sealed a pact with the woman and contracted with her a considerable debt, sanctioned by juju rituals. Beki dreamed of Europe and believed she could study and have a better life than that of her sisters and family, but she soon realized that she would be started into prostitution. She initially refused, and this is why she was repeatedly beaten and abused by the compatriots she was entrusted to prostitute in Bamako. She realized that to save her life she should cooperate, and that is why she finally agree to the requests of her jailers, experiencing the isolation typical of being in a foreign country and having to carry the burden associated with the fear of breaking the pact sanctioned with the juju. Distressed due to the constant threats of death for herself and her parents, scared of going mad and die, Beki prostituted herself until she had repaid the debt. At that time she decided to continue her journey despite the dangers, helped by a French man, that she met in Mali and who supported her economically to reach Libya, after a journey marked by a number of dangers and violence of all kinds. She is currently in a protection programme and is determined to help other girls like her. That is why she asked the centre housing to start a training course as a mediator, choosing the hospital as apprenticeship context.

Those stories of migrant girls have been collected by Gandolfa Cascio, Psychologist and Coordinator of the Faro Project of Terre des Hommes in Catania and Syracuse. Names and some sensitive details have been changed.
Chapter 8
Violence on girls and young women

Violence against women and girls has become nothing short of an epidemic. According to the World Health Organization, 35% of women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence from their partner or strangers. About 120 million girls under the age of 20 (one in ten globally) have suffered "forced relations or other forced sexual acts". Violence has a negative impact on the physical, mental and sexual health of girls, exposing them, for example, to the risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. This abuse, in 30% of cases at the hands of the female's partner, has further negative consequences on these women and girls' children. First of all, because they too can be more easily subjected to violence and mistreatment. In addition, children with a history of violence and abuse in the home are more likely to repeat those patterns, considering them to be "normal". About half of girls aged between 15 and 19 (126 million) think it is normal for a husband to beat his wife.

For the NGO "Equality now", rapes and violence are a global epidemic. "Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, which is inflicted on women and girls, has reached epidemic proportions. If it were a disease, sexual violence would be taken into serious consideration, and governments and independent donors would allocate funds to fight it."

A situation that is worsened further by a series of regulations that - in some way - alleviate the position of those who commit violence or even make it perfectly legal. An investigation by the

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85 http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/
86 http://www.who.int/life-course/partners/global-strategy/ewec-globalstrategyreport-200915.pdf?ua=1
87 "Impact area overview. The right to protection from violence", Plan International
same NGO reveals that in 10 countries (of the 82 studied), rape of a woman or a girl is legal if it is by her husband. In four of these countries, if the wife is a child bride, her husband is sanctioned: but only for breach of the law on the minimum age for marriage. In many countries (at least nine of those studied) the rapist can rectify his circumstances by marrying the victim. In other legislations (at least 12), the perpetrator of abuse can reach a settlement with the victim's family to avoid being charged.

Lastly, there are also several countries (at least 15 of the 82 studied) where rape is considered a crime against morality. In the legislation of these countries (including Afghanistan, Belgium, China, India, Indonesia, Luxembourg, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Singapore, Taiwan, Yemen) instead of the word "rape", inappropriate terms such as humiliation, honour, modesty, chastity or morality are used. In Italy, rape was only classed as a crime against a person in 1996.

There is also an additional element that - indirectly - penalizes girl and woman victims of violence: the male component is clearly overwhelming in institutions, police forces and the courts. For example, women sitting in parliamentary benches around the world make up only 22.7%, women judges account for only 27% of the total number, 26% of magistrates and 9% of the police force. "This means that 73% of judges and the vast majority of people who write laws or put them into practice are men," reports Equality Now.

Girls and young women must deal with the "daily" violence that marks their lives at home from parents, brothers or other relatives, at school or at work. The most common form of physical violence that young girls and adolescents suffer is the violence exercised against them by parents and caregivers to achieve respect and discipline. It is estimated that nearly 2 out of 3 children in the world - aged between 10 and 14 - undergo regular corporal punishment.

**Offences against minors: Records of Victims**

Every day the headlines of our newspapers and social media seem to strive to describe a world devastated by violence, hate and lack of respect for the most elementary human rights. And by using the summary data from the State Police Command Force, we could limit to the sensationalist headline: records of violence against minors. It has been a decade since the number of crimes committed against children and teenagers has been so high, affecting as many as 5,383 minors. But looking at the data there is something that does not add up behind the screaming headlines. Instead of playing at being the journalist with the scoop, we should be reporting on a different and in some ways perhaps even more dramatic reality: the family is the most dangerous place for children.

There are as many as 1,618 (30% of the total) victims of abuse in the home, an increase of 12% compared to 2015. But are the numbers provided to the Indifesa Observatory by the Armed Forces truly the reality? Since the cases pursued by the police, Carabinieri and magistrates are always just the tip of an iceberg of violence without any charges or evidence, except in the psyche and body of the children affected, these figures may simply tell us of a more aware country that is less prone to an attitude of tacit complicity; one that is capable of getting rid of the happy family rhetoric once and for all, to protect the youngest and weakest from daily harassment, power games and hateful abuse, even if that means keeping their wounds a secret. It's hard to say.

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88 The countries are Ghana, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Lesotho, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Tanzania
89 Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Philippines, Tajikistan and Tunisia
Of course the rising numbers are shocking and as far as gender is concerned, it shocks reading that girls and young women, and their fragile bodies and lives in evolution, still remain the battlefield of a sexuality experienced as abuse and violence: 82% of the victims of child pornography are female, as are 62% of the victims of child prostitution, 80% of the victims of sexual acts with minors and more than 80% of the victims of sexual violence and aggravated sexual violence (altogether almost one fifth of the total offences!).

Based on these numbers, a large chunk of the work we must all do in the coming years will focus on emotional and sexual education and the protection of children, also within the family.

Terre des Hommes will do its part and asks the institutions and the private sector to help strengthen its Indifesa Observatory by encouraging young people to participate by spreading good practices and new forms of awareness and training that focuses on counteracting violence in all its forms, starting with gender-based violence.

#indifesa Stories

On the side of Nice and African girls
"Change comes with time, you don't change because you are ordered to...you have to get there. I want to grow up and change "and, then, she says with a smile," they will not recognize me anymore, so much I've changed."
Dona is one of the many girls between the ages of 8 and 17 who prostitute themselves, "survival sex," explains Alessandro Rabbiosi, representative of Terre des Hommes for Côte d'Ivoire. He is assigned to these young girls. There are many of them. It is estimated that about a thousand are potentially at risk or sell themselves for a few euro cents in Grand Bassam, a city of 80,000 inhabitants, not far from the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, Abidjan. Dona says, "when I get up my first thought is pot," and the ghetto in her neighborhood, Dinosaurs, is where she goes first thing in the morning. In order to cope better, she uses drugs, not just pot, but also methamphetamine tablets, here they call them "habidou" (a dose of pot costs 200 CFA francs, a tablet 500). "Yes, you want to know how many customers every night? I don't know ... many, even three. Sometimes even more." Local customers, but also many whites. But the earnings are meager: 200 CFA francs per customer (0.30 euro), sometimes 500 (0.80 euro). A pittance. "In order to have a certain number of clients, many of these young girls must take drugs before," says Rabbiosi, "In order to do this, they contract debts with the drug dealers and then become victims and at the mercy of the dealers. They keep taking on more debts. They enter a vicious cycle from which it is difficult to get out of."

"I'm not doing anything now, but next year," says Dona with a touch of pride, "I want to go to Ifef (a kind of professional college for girls, n.e.i.). Yes, I'd like to change life. I would love to learn to write, to read. Become a dressmaker, or a confectioner," but also "a lawyer, but you have to study. I can read and write a little bit, but not much." Her ideas are not very clear, but attending the "mother-daughter-centre" created by the Abele Community and Terre des Hommes, has certainly stirred something in her. Dona is one of the latest arrivals. Seeing other girls like her starting to make it, leaving that life behind, is certainly stimulating. "Dona has tremendous potential," Rabbiosi explains, "but she still does not see clear alternatives to what she usually does. Even now, first order of business is taking drugs, then looking for customers and, overall, living day by day from an extreme on the road perspective... the cursed charm of a lifestyle at the margins of society and steeped in small and big crime, which is so strong, even among the youth of these latitudes and is facilitated by the absence of tangible life alternatives-opportunities. However, she is attending the centre activities regularly, which is the reason why we are hoping for the best. We are confident we can include her in a training course" suitable for her skills and enabling her to overcome her flaws. The desire for change is there. Dona seems to have made a decision and she is willing to underline that she made it alone, "no one asked me to do so. Before I was going to school, but I never attended any class, I remained out and did not do anything. I used to smoke, then go to Dangoro, where is the music, the drinking and the guys, the beach." Terre des Hommes's approach is very laical, "we do not judge them morally," says Rabbiosi, "we simply tell them that they are important for us, they are not left to themselves. We reject the idea that they are meant simply to survive and please their customers. We definitely reject that." The work is hard. "We often have the impression of trying to empty the ocean with a colander, but we hang in there because the first results are encouraging." Dona realized that there is a viable alternative, that she is building it, though it requires efforts, aware that she no longer wants to be the pray of other people pleasure and the maker of her own destruction.

This is why Dona has become the leading role of the project #dallapartedice, voicing African girls, who wish to count and leave behind a past of denied rights. A polimediale project by the association Hic Sunt Leones to tell the story of little girls and girls who, in a number of African regions, have broken the chain of the long history of violence and abuse of power through male control over their bodies and lives. Telling, informing, communicating is a way to "make them free", it means letting their voices be heard, helping them and supporting them in their struggle for freedom and dignity. To be #dallapartedine means spreading their stories. The seven journalist founders of the association, who met in Africa while writing about Africa, want to do just that because they are sick and tired of reporting what never changes, because a child or a woman in those stories does not make the difference. For those seven journalists, they do. For this reason, to
find and collect stories of ransom and hope, they walked through the alleys of the slums in Guinea and Kenya, they went to the heart of South Sudan at war, to the endless savannahs at the feet of the Kilimanjaro, to Congo devastated for its same wealth, among the Ugandan former soldier girls and sex slaves in Côte d’Ivoire. The "seven" Hic Sunt Leones will portray those faces, those stories, using all the tools of their trade: video, tv, webTV, radio, photography, theater, books. Enjoy it!

Angelo Ferrari,
AGI

#dallapartedinece
Chapter 9
The ScuolaZoo Observatory

Let's take a walk in the classroom and imagine spending a day with our high school boys and girls. After overcoming the initial embarrassment due to the age difference and the feeling of being outsiders, let's allow time to pass and try to settle in, becoming familiar with this new dimension, that will never be the same as our adolescence. And let's start to talk of this and that, music, teachers, holidays, sports ... Okay, I must say that the game would not work, despite everything, the gaps would be too many, the distrust would be huge, and it would be hard to delve into the thorniest issues.

For this reason, for the past 4 years, the Observatory on Violence and Gender Stereotyping of Terre des Hommes avails itself of the precious collaboration of ScuolaZoo, the largest Italian community of boys and girls in secondary schools: a research, totally unique in Italy, that originates with the kids, lives in schools during the meetings held by ScuolaZoo representatives and feeds on the trust and a relationship among peers that no researcher would be able to recreate.

In short, it is our friends of ScuolaZoo, who are walking in the classroom, young people who recently graduated from high school or college, often summer holiday buddies of the young respondents. It is them who collect the viewpoints of almost 2,000 people (they were 1,870 in 2017) aged between 14 and 19 on Gender Violence, Stereotypes and Internet Dangers.

But which portrayal of our kids do these 44 questions render? Let's browse through their answers and explore.

Gender-based violence
Is gender-based violence a cultural phenomenon, or is it justifiable or explainable as a momentary raptus, the result of alcohol and drug induced obfuscation, or prompted by precarious economic
conditions which is the source of stress (for the male head of the family, of course...)? What do our kids think?
We must say that the answers often differ based on gender and that it is not always easy to get a very clear idea, but even more so, it might be worth to let the data do the talking.

According to 77.1% of respondents, the alibi of "provocation" of the male abuser by the woman, fortunately, does not stand up. No reason can justify violence! Good sign, too bad that the percentage drops by over 10 points in male respondents so that only 66.8% of boys think this way. Good, but not that much, I would say.

According to 47.5% of respondents, the abusers have alcohol and drug problems. Both males and females seem to agree on this. The same goes for the fact that abusing men must have psychological issues (76.5% of people agree). Is it good? Is it bad? Maybe just too simplistic and somewhat "exculpatory". Especially because 53.9% of males thinks that after all "violence is the result of a momentary loss of control" and perhaps this is not good news.

Therefore, are the cases of domestic violence against women and feminicide that ogle from the home page of news sites and TV news headlines, in the end, just the tip of the iceberg and the indicators of a real problem, or are they merely a result of the "usual" media manipulation? 73% of respondents do not believe it to be a setup, and this is encouraging news ... but the boys seem to be far more suspicious because the percentage drops to 67.6%. Well, we will settle for that.

We are a bit less contented to hear answers like "no one has the right to intrude" in what is happening within the couple given by 34.3% of boys and the idea, voiced by 39.5% of males, that violence is more common among "families without education or very poor". Not really good. And not that good either about the statement "women should not endure violence within the couple, especially if they have children." It is true that 80.1% of the respondents said that they agree, but they were nearly 90% last year and 10 percentage points less truly seems like a lot: how much did the fact that this year’s research shifted mainly to the South have to do with it?

**Gender stereotypes**

Gender violence is mainly fought around stereotypes and everyday behaviors. We are convinced of that. At play here is a radical change in a culture that, even if we do not notice it, still nests in our homes. So, gleaning from answers, the 24.3% of boys who think that men should not "take part in housekeeping tasks", or the 23.5% (still males) who think it is downright "humiliating for a man to carry out housekeeping tasks" and, finally, the 36.3% (still males) who think that "taking care of the home and family is the task of women" seem to indicate that we are still a very long way away for a country that has been discussing equality of gender and violence for years. The same country which, conversely, has in many ways been walking backwards to the point that, good heavens, 44.3% of males (yes, you read that right, the forty-four point three percent) thinks that it is the man who "must be head of the family." Not good at all!

Perhaps it is truly time for the school to add, at a national level and as part of a renewed zeal for citizenship education, "hours of education to prevent violence against women and foster respect for gender identity." 81.3% of the respondents is asking for this, and we and them believe that it is high time that we finally confront this issue head-on.

**Sexting and Network Dangers**

The last part of our journey among high school desks and of our "chat" with the students is more closely related to their daily lives and their relationship with smartphones and social networking.

Today, communications are increasingly circulating on the impalpable thread of instant messaging (63.9% of respondents prefer this mode to any other form of sharing) and even timed or anonymous (see the success of the latest "sarahah" app), but how protected do Italian teenagers feel? How do they use Internet and social media? Are they hiding behind a device to look like someone else or do they remain themselves? Are they vigilant or naive? Do they perceive the risk or does "virtuality" act as a (ephemeral) protective shield?
For one thing, while the news seems to paint a picture of our kids having come to the point of exchanging pictures in erotic or explicitly sexual poses easy as pie, 72% of interviewed kids does not believe this to be the norm and, above all, they consider the practice risky. 76.8% (80% last year), is convinced that "seeing sexual images of themselves circulating, without their consent, online or on other people's phones," is as serious as "suffering physical violence" because (claim 65.8% of respondents), what happens on the net is just as "real" as what happens outside the net, and can have very heavy consequences in people's lives. Maybe we could work to increase this percentage, but the data is encouraging, as is encouraging the willingness to supervise contents posted by "peers": "if I see a friend posting a content that could cause problems or that he/she should not post on a social network, I tell him," says 77.1% of respondents and, "if I see an illicit content on a social network, I use the reporting tools to alert the social network operator" says the 70.4%.

We do not know if they really do that, but we like to think that, if necessary, our kids would not stand by and watch, and would be able to make the right decision.

Today, Italian teenagers seem definitely more aware of the dangers of the network than a few years ago and increasingly look at the Internet not only as a place to stay in touch with friends or explore new relationships, but also as "a learning tool" and a "teaching environment" in itself (netiquette, freedom of expression, privacy) that they would like to be able to use and study in school like they do with other subjects: 78.5% of respondents are asking for this.

In short, a picture of lights and shadows, among confirmations and surprises, elements that seem to get clearer and new questions that open up for the future and which we will continue to explore in 2018, focusing on the direct participation of the kids and listening to their voice. We will do that trying to create new formulas and new means and to investigate new issues.

If you would like to participate, we would also like to hear your voice: send us your questions or the topics you would like us to work on at comunicazione@tdhitaly.org referencing the "indifesa" Observatory in the subject line. We will create the next questionnaire together with you.
Conclusions

«The future of the world will be determined by the fate of 10 year old girls». This evocative statement by the UNPA sums up the purpose and importance of this sixth Indifesa dossier that our Ngo has prepared with key input from law enforcement and many other associations that partner with us, in Italy and worldwide, on issues related to the rights of girls. We believe that there is no other way to prevent and combat the many faces of a complex and articulate phenomenon such as violence against the girl-child, other than to have access to data based on the experience of those who are, on a daily basis, trying to understand it. With such data we can refine our strategies to ensure the respect of the fundamental rights of these girls who are, we would like to stress, the pillars of tomorrow’s world, and whose nascent lives must be accompanied and supported today along with a path of self-determination and awareness of their own role. As usual, we focused primarily on the situation in our country, where the new forms of violence have not yet been adequately studied and combated, which prompted us to ask the Government to dedicate special efforts to both research and prevention methods. We need to introduce new forms of awareness and new cultural, sociological, and political categories so that the Italy of tomorrow, that we must prepare today, is a place where our girls will have the prominence they deserve.

Raffaele K. Salinari, President of Foundation Terre des Hommes Italy