



The Condition of the Girl Child worldwide

by **Terre des Hommes**

10th Edition



On the occasion of the **International Day of the Girl Child**, introduced by the **UN** in 2012 and celebrated yearly on October 11th, **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 **campaign to raise awareness**, in the last 10 years Terre des Hommes has placed 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.

For further information: www.indifesa.org

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Since 1960, Terre des Hommes is on 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 816 projects in favour of children. Terre des Hommes Foundation Italy is a member of the Terre des Hommes International Federation; it works in partnership with EU DG ECHO and is accredited by the European Union, the UN, USAID and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For further information: www.terredeshommes.it, tel. +39 02 28970418

Texts by: Ilaria Sesana, Rossella Panuzzo, Paolo Ferrara

Editor: Rossella Panuzzo

Supervisor: Paolo Ferrara

Contributions from: **Contributi di:** Lucia Abbinante, Laura Chello, Miriam Cresta, Denise Di Dio, Stefano Del ni, Paolo Ferrara, Ludovica Mantovani, Claudia Segre

Scientific Committee : Claudia Segre, Global Thinking Foundation president; Cristina Blasetti, Development & Social Responsibility, FIGC; Denise Di Dio, Prime Minister President; Federica Gasbarro, biologist and woman delegate to Y4C di COP26; Gaia Marzo, Corporate Brand Director& Equity Partner OneDay Group; Lucia Abbinante, Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani Director; Ludovica Mantovani, Divisione Calcio Femminile FIGC and Fondazione Torneo Ravano Coppa Paolo Mantovani President; Martina Rogato, Sherpa W20 Italia; Miriam Cresta, CEO Junior Achievement Italia; Renata Duretti, The Circle Italia Onlus; Vera Gheno, Linguist.

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Preface

As last year, the InDifesa Dossier of Terre des Hommes offers us a punctual look into the condition of little girls and young women around the world. A look into that small part of the human community that often dwells in the shadow, forgotten along with the precarious situation that afflicts them.

Covid-19 has particularly aggravated the gender inequality, as well as all the pre-existing condition of vulnerability. On one hand, the data show a painful sight, too many little girls and young women deprived of their rights. On the other one, those figures pave the way with even greater sharpness, to restore the old and new disparities.

Along this road, we must pick up the pace, and it is now time for us to take actions: investing in education, prevention and in the empowerment of women, which is primarily the liberation of the still dramatically unexpressed female energy. And it is time to act concretely so that each little girl, every single young woman, may build herself the future she desires.

The protection of women's dignity and freedom is the precondition of whichever commitment to be undertaken on international level. This is the message we launched in Santa Margherita Ligure at the first conference on the empowerment of women within G20, under the Italian presidency.

Italy has chosen with conviction, to set the reboot and its own development, the road of having women as protagonists on equal footing with men. Equality remains a goal to be reached on any level, focusing on work and economic empowerment, on the theme of environment and sustainability, on the access to scientific materials and financial/digital skills. It's the epochal challenge which awaits us and that we can overcome if we are able to eradicate in every area: from family to education and work. Those inequalities that weigh down upon the life of women, taking away opportunities from early childhood. It is necessary and urgent to break the system of stereotypes that blocks women's world and suppresses their potentials.

Italy has chosen to unleash this energy and to set free the opportunities that belong to women. Gender equality is an over-arching objective of the plan "Piano Italia Domani", approved as part of Next Generation EU (NGEU). For the first time we have a multiannual National Strategy for gender equality with an integrated approach to the promotion of equal opportunities, and precise indicators for the measurement of objectives achieved. This process also includes the reform of the Family Act, the new Plan for Childhood and Adolescence as well as the projects we are pursuing, to ensure that the National Strategic Plan to combat violence against women will finally become a structural tool for our country.

The present time leaves us with countless wounds to heal: Terre des Hommes will never cease to bring everyone to the deserved attention. We are also handed an unprecedented opportunity: it is up to us to seize it in order to guarantee a fairer and more sustainable future for all the little girls and soon-to-be women.

Elena Bonetti

Minister for Family and Equal Opportunities

Introduction

Economist Cristina Compagno is right when saying that “*COVID-19 has eaten up gender equality!*” These past years were full of progress in safeguarding the rights of young girls and in countering gender discrimination. They have also seen an increased involvement from institutions, communities and public opinion, and the achievement of many legislative goals in countries that used to be unwilling to confront gender inequality. These years had us thinking that 2021 - when both the “Indifesa” [undefended] campaign and the proclamation the International Day of the Girl Child reached their ten-year anniversary - would have been the year to celebrate all of these achievements.

The dossier that you are holding in your hands gives a wide range of research material on what happened during this pandemic crisis: from dropping out of school to expecting additional 10 million child brides in the next decade; from the dramatic increase in domestic violence, practically registered in every country around the world (including Italy), to the expected rise in Female Genital Mutilation. The virus had a great impact on the exclusion of girls and young women from labour, school and high quality training, having obvious repercussions even in Italy, where the female percentage of NEET has increased further from 27,9 to 29,3%.

Out of many figures, one in particular shows how much was lost due to the pandemic: before the outbreak of Covid-19, it was estimated that 99 years would have “sufficed” to reach gender equality. Instead, today we know that it will take at least 135 years to fill in this Gender Gap.

On the other hand, the report, perhaps never as extensive as this year’s, manages to offer as well an overview regarding the achievement of concrete results through the segmentation of data, experimentation of best practices, involvement of various players and leading role of girls and boys, challenging old customs, taboos and legislations already outdated by common feeling.

Today, the great challenge is restarting from here, aware of the need to invest more and faster in order to recover the time lost and bring stability to the progress made in the years prior to the pandemic. This will be difficult to achieve in a place where the number of children living in low-waged families increased in only one year to 142 million units. However, we can count on the gained experience, the great energy generated over these years - which saw especially the youngest girls taking control of their own fate - and the mentality that in many countries is finally breaking the historic chains of male chauvinism.

Europe and Italy will have new resources at their disposal to restart in the right direction, thanks to the European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the National Strategy 2021-2026 and the Recovery and Resilience National Plan. However, it will majorly depend on the ability to set realistic objectives and clear indicators, monitoring the impact of new investments, quickly adapting plans based on results and checking the repercussions they will have on the life quality of young girls and women.

As for the poorest countries worldwide, it is necessary first of all to make the Covid-19 vaccines universally accessible and then draw up an investment plan having the future of the new generations at the centre of the attention, starting from a gender perspective. We - Terre des Hommes - will continue to control, keep the attention alive and work to build a world where inequalities and discrimination are finally outdated.

I would like to sincerely thank the Scientific Committee - founded to mark the occasion of this tenth edition of the Dossier - that is composed of excellent female professionals in various fields, who gave fundamental contributions to the document we are presenting.

Happy reading and happy International Day of the Girl Child!

Paolo Ferrara, Terre des Hommes Italia General Manager, and **Donatella Vergari**, Terre des Hommes Italia President

Chapter I

Goal of zero female genital mutilation further away



In June 2021 Puntland, a semi-autonomous region of Somalia, passed a law banning the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM)¹. This is very important news considering that it is the country with the highest incidence of female genital mutilation in the world. According to the latest estimates contained in the ‘*Somali health and demographic survey*’ 99% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been forced to undergo this violent practice which undermines their fundamental rights². Puntland's decision comes just over a year after Sudan's transitional government enacted a law in May 2020 banning female genital mutilation, with a penalty of up to three years in prison for those who violate the ban³.

To date, of the 28 African countries where the practice is most widespread, there are 5 countries where female genital cutting is not prohibited: Somalia (now with the exception of Puntland), Chad, Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone. However, “*in many of the countries where a law against female genital mutilation is in place, existing legislation is not effective in protecting girls and young women from this practice*”, reports 28 Too Many, an organization engaged in the research and prevention of this practice. “*There are few examples of what can be considered comprehensive laws, many need to be tightened up and improved, and some of the real challenges to ending FGM around the world, such as medicalized and cross-border FGM, are currently overlooked in most legal frameworks*”.

1 <https://www.africarivista.it/somalia-il-puntland-vieta-le-mutilazioni-genitali-femminili/186725/>

2 <https://somalia.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-somalia-congratulates-puntland-passing-bill-prohibits-female-genital-mutilation-fgm>

3 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52502489>

The impact of COVID-19 on the fight against female genital mutilation

One of the consequences of COVID-19 is that it has triggered what the United Nations have called a “hidden epidemic”, characterized by an increase in various forms of violence that disproportionately affected girls and women. And that, among the many consequences, has also caused an interruption of the campaigns against female genital mutilation promoted by international agencies and NGOs. In all likelihood this abrupt stop to prevention campaigns, combined with the impossibility for professionals and activists to travel, has led to an increase in genital mutilation operations on girls and young women.

As the 2020 edition of the United Nations' *'State of the World Population'* report states, programs to eliminate or prevent female genital mutilation are often excluded from intervention plans in the event of humanitarian emergencies. During the initial stages of the pandemic, for example, most countries where female genital mutilation is widespread did not prioritize the elimination of the practice in their national humanitarian response plans. And yet, several studies have indicated an increased risk of girls and young women being made to suffer this practice: 31% of people interviewed by UNFPA during a survey conducted in Somalia, believe that there has been an increase in genital mutilation, and other organizations have found similar trends in other African countries⁴.

According to the most accredited international estimates, there are currently more than 200 million women and girls around the world who are survivors of female genital cutting. In 2015, the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development had set 2030 as the end point for an ambitious goal: to eliminate female genital mutilation. However, “even in those countries where the practice has become less common, efforts should be multiplied tenfold to achieve an end to genital mutilation by 2030”, highlights the UN report on progress toward the 2030 Agenda⁵.

According to estimates by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) prepared before the pandemic, in the absence of a marked reversal of the trend, between 2015 and 2030 around 68 million girls and young women, more than 4.5 million a year, could suffer “the cut”. The COVID-19 epidemic and the measures taken to try to contain the circulation of the virus (school closures, travel restrictions, etc.) have forced international agencies to revise their estimates upwards, bringing the number of girls and young women mutilated to 70 million. According to UNICEF and UNFPA estimates, in fact, in the next ten years 2 million girls and young women who likely could have avoided it, will be forced to undergo this practice.

As the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has underlined, “female genital mutilation violates the human rights (of women, Ed.) and they do not have any medical benefit.” As the WHO itself points out, the practice of female genital mutilation “reflects a deep-rooted inequality between the sexes and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity”⁶.

Removal of the genitals is an intervention that is usually performed without anesthesia and that, in addition to excruciating pain, can cause infections, tissue damage, permanent damage to the genital system and even the death of the girl. Sexual intercourse and childbirth become very painful. Many women who have undergone this practice suffer from the painful consequences, both physical and psychological, for the rest of their lives.

4 UNFPA, *State of the World Population: My Body is My Own*, 2021 https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SoWP2021_Report_-_EN_web.3.21_0.pdf

5 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>

6 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

The economic impact of genital mutilation

A recent study by the World Health Organization, however, also highlights another significant element: the economic cost. According to Ian Askew, director of the WHO Department of sexual and reproductive health, "this practice is not only a violation of the fundamental human rights of girls and young women but also depletes the economic resources of the countries involved."

According to WHO estimates, the global cost of treating women living with the conditions caused by "the cut" amounts to 1.4 billion dollars a year. For the individual countries, these costs approach an average of 10% of their entire annual health expenditure. In some countries, this figure rises to 30%. These costs are expected to rise further as the number of girls and young women subjected to this practice increases⁷.

An interactive data tool developed by the WHO⁸ makes it possible to estimate costs for individual countries. In Egypt, for example, in 2019 the healthcare expenditure for treating the conditions resulting from "the cut" is estimated at 876 million dollars. If there is no change of course, this expenditure will reach 1,215 million dollars in 2048. In Kenya this would rise from the current figure of 19 million dollars to 31 million dollars. In Somalia (where the phenomenon affects almost all women) the figure is set to double from the current 5.3 million dollars to over 10 million.

In Italy and Europe

To mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6th February 2021, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has published new estimations of the number of girls at risk of FGM in four European countries: Denmark, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria.

While an increase in migration from countries where there is an existing tradition of FGM since 2011 has put greater numbers of girls at risk, laws and campaigns against the practice are working. *"FGM-affected communities are increasingly opposed to the practice and continue to lead greater and greater efforts to eliminate it"*⁹, commented Carlien Scheele, director of the EIGE.

All four countries under consideration have laws in place that punish female genital cutting, even if the procedure was carried out abroad. However, there are still a high number of girls at risk. In Denmark, the threat of "the cut" affects between 11 and 21 % of girls from at-risk countries (between 1,400 and 2,500 girls). In Spain, the percentage ranges from 9 to 15% (in absolute numbers, the figure rises to 3,400 - 6,000 girls). In Luxembourg, the incidence is similar, between 12 and 17%, but in absolute numbers it is much lower (between 100 and 130 girls). In Austria, 12-18% of girls are at risk (between 700 and 1,000). The risk, warns the EIGE, increases among girls who are seeking asylum: 37% in Denmark, 19% in Luxembourg, 31% in Austria.

The previous edition of the research estimating the incidence of female genital mutilation among young migrants in 2016 captured the situation in Belgium (out of more than 22,500 girls from countries that practice female genital mutilation, the percentage of those at risk was between 16 and 27%) and France (12-21% of girls at risk out of more than 205,000).

In Italy, the EIGE estimates that in 2016, out of a total of more than 76,000 girls (aged 18 or younger) from countries where FGM is practiced (predominantly Egypt, but also including Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Guinea), between 15 and 24 % were at risk.

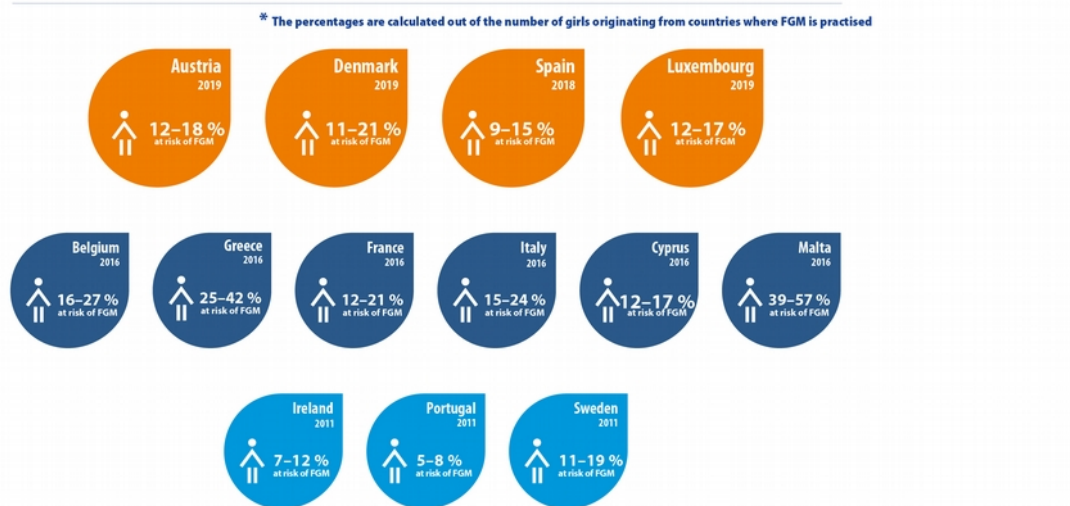
7 <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-02-2020-female-genital-mutilation-hurts-women-and-economies>

8 <https://srhr.org/fgmcost/cost-calculator/>

9 <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/female-genital-mutilation/risk-estimations>

In terms of percentage, there is a decrease compared to the previous report in 2011 (18-27%). However, the total population of migrant girls from those countries has increased in the years since the report (from 59,720 to 76,040) therefore the absolute number of girls at risk has risen.

Number* of girls at risk of Female Genital Mutilation



It is possible to change traditions

For the Kuria people in Tanzania, the ritual cutting of young girls' genitalia is an ancient tradition which is considered to be a rite of passage into adulthood. Girls and women have little say in the matter; it is the village chiefs who perform the procedure, despite the fact that FGM has been illegal since 1998.

When schools are closed, girls between the ages of 7 and 17 are taken to the village square and have to undress in front of everyone. The genital mutilation procedure is carried out with razor blades. Afterwards, the girls have to get up, they are dressed in very colourful clothes and walk home loaded with small gifts. Soon they will be married.

Girls who refuse to be mutilated face harsh consequences within their families and communities. Because of their courageous decision they are insulted, abused, socially excluded, thrown out of the house and sometimes even disowned. The same happens to the few boys who refuse traditional circumcision. Terre des Hommes Netherlands, together with ATFGM (Association for the Termination of Female Genital Mutilation), runs a rescue centre to save Kuria girls and boys from "the cut" and campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of FGM and the abandonment of the practice among traditional communities and leaders.

Here are some testimonies:

Debi (14): "I am regularly insulted in public for not being cut. When I was 9 years old, my father sent me to my sisters' cutting ceremony. I mostly remember the blood, and this made me swear that I never wanted to be mutilated."

Eunice (15): "Because I refused to be cut, in my father's eyes I died. His daughters are mutilated or do not exist."

Stefani (17): "My father's clan insists that I be mutilated and then married".

Debora (16): "My brother never wanted me to go to school, he wanted me to stay at home so I could get married."

Rose (17): "When I refused to be mutilated, my mother and grandmother locked me in a room and started to beat me."

Nice (15): "My brother disowned me when I refused to be mutilated. He told me to leave our house and forget about having a family. He also said that all my things would be burned."

Over the past three years, the Terre des Hommes Netherlands project has achieved important results:

- 1516 Kuria girls were rescued and protected from FGM. They were given temporary shelter in the Masanga rescue centre so that they could avoid the ceremony and undergo an alternative rite of passage into adulthood.
 - 165 children were trained and supported as peer educators to raise awareness among their cohort about the effects of FGM.
 - 48 traditional leaders (Kuria elders) and 66 traditional mutilators (ngaribas) have renounced FGM.
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Chapter 2

Girls and access to education



“During a crisis as devastating as COVID-19, girls and young women are the first to be forced to leave school and the last to be allowed back in. But having educated young women is fundamental for public health and for the regrowth of the economy”. In April 2020, Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai issued a warning and appealed to governments all over the world to act as soon as possible in order to guarantee “that all girls would be able to return to school by the end of the crisis”¹⁰.

¹⁰ <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19>

A few weeks earlier, UNESCO¹¹ had released some dramatic estimates: following the closure of schools in over 190 countries worldwide, 90% of the global student population (1.5 billion students, 743 million of which were girls) was forced to interrupt their studies. Furthermore, according to calculations, 11 million girls never returned to school. Estimates from the Malala Foundation (published in April 2020) based on the events of Sierra Leone during the Ebola epidemic of 2014 were even more pessimistic: in the absence of targeted interventions, 20 million girls would've never returned to school¹². As of mid-July 2021, 18 months from the start of the COVID-19 epidemic, primary schools were still closed in 19 countries (of which Peru, Venezuela, Honduras, Panama, Cambodia and Sri Lanka) depriving over 156 million students of their education.

This means that the strides made in the last 25 years to include more and more girls in school are in serious jeopardy: *"There is still much work to be done in order to achieve gender equality. We must not let the pandemic thwart our efforts or undermine the progress we made since 1995"*, the general director of UNESCO writes in the preface of the *"Global education monitoring report"* from 2020¹³. Between 1995 and 2018, the number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary education has increased by 180 million. Before the outbreak, girls and boys were equally enrolled in primary school (whereas in 1995 there was a ratio of 90 girls every 100 boys) with a significant improvement in southern Asia: India in particular has spearheaded the progress of female education. The rate of female enrolment in universities has grown threefold.

However, despite the progress made, "girls continue to face the worst forms of exclusion", emphasizes UNESCO. On a global level, three quarters of children who will never set foot in a primary school are female. In particular, it's the girls who make up the poorer social classes and those who live in rural contexts who are majorly penalised. In countries such as Cameroon, Guinea, Pakistan and Yemen, equality of access to education for girls is only registered in the top 20% richest portion of the population, and between those who live in urban areas. Conversely, the highest level of inequality is met in the bottom 20% poorest, and in rural areas. In Pakistan's bottom 20%, only 70% of girls have attended primary school, against 100% of boys.

Even though it will take years to understand the full extent of COVID-19's impact on girls' education, there are some indicators that already confirm the preoccupation expressed by NGOs and United Nations agencies. The American philanthropic organization Echidna Giving highlights how the rates of school re-enrolment for teenage girls are lower than those for similarly aged boys in some countries. *"Even temporary obstacles to access to education can make it difficult to return to school"*, reads a document from the association. *"In Ghana, 9% (of girls, ed.) have not returned to school due to pregnancy. In Kenya, 84% of teenage girls have returned to school desks against 92% of boys. Out of the more vulnerable girls who live in rural and low-income areas of east Africa who haven't returned to school, 40% of them haven't done so due to pregnancy."*¹⁴.

11 <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-unesco-and-partners-education-launch-global-campaign-keep-girls-picture>

12 Malala Fund, *Girls education and Covid-19*, 2020

https://downloads.ctfassets.net/0oan5gk9rgbh/6TMYLYAcUpjhQpXLDgmdIa/3e1c12d8d827985ef2b4e815a3a6da1f/COVID19_GirlsEducation_corrected_071420.pdf

13 Unesco, *A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*, 2020 <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/2020genderreport>

14 <https://echidnagiving.org/april-2021/>

High dropout rates are to be expected amongst girls in Latin American countries. In many of which, schools have remained closed for the entire 2020-21 academic year, since the beginning of classes in March, which coincided with the COVID breakout.

Analysing what was the impact of COVID-19 on schools and particularly on female education in low to medium income countries is very important. A safe school indeed represents for girls a precious layer of protection from such threats as child marriage, unplanned pregnancies and rape. High quality education can allow girls to significantly improve their lives, gaining the necessary competence to break the poverty cycle. On the other hand, a closed, insecure and hard to reach school can be the first step to halting studies and the start to a vicious cycle of poverty which will become harder and harder to break as the years go on.

In Sub-Saharan African countries (which were already registering high rates of school dropouts for girls, and the highest levels of teenage pregnancies before the start of the pandemic), it is estimated that schools shutting down due to the COVID-19 crisis could lead to a rise in teenage pregnancies by 65%: in absolute terms, we're talking of approximately a million girls¹⁵.

Another element which could have hindered the return to school is familial pressure put on girls - more so than boys - to carry out household chores and taking care of their younger siblings. The last but not least important factor indicated by UNICEF is the *digital divide*: in many countries classes have moved online, a "world" which is far less accessible to girls than it is to boys. A research conducted by UNICEF on a sample of middle and low income countries highlights how disadvantaged girls are in comparison to their male peers in the acquisition of Information Technology (IT) skills, both at home and at school: in Ghana, 16% of boys aged between 15 and 18 have gained IT skills, as opposed to the 7% of girls in the same age group¹⁶. Owning a Personal Computer (PC) at home facilitates the acquisition of IT skills. *"But the presence of a computer at home does not nullify the gender divide - emphasizes UNICEF - In more than half of the analysed countries, teenage boys use the PC and access the internet more frequently than girls do. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, 46% of teenage boys use their home PC at least once a week against 24% of girls. The gender norms which hinder girls from accessing these technologies can be one of the elements which accentuates this gap"*.

15 World Vision International, Covid-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied, 2020,

https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Covid19%20Aftershocks_Access%20Denied_small.pdf

16 <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/covid-19-and-education-the-digital-gender-divide-among-adolescents-in-sub-saharan-africa/>

The Education of Girls in Afghanistan is at Risk

A few days after the fall of Kabul into the hands of the Taliban, ten girls from the Afghan girls robotic team (a group of young students from Herat, in western Afghanistan) managed to leave the country thanks to the visas made available by the government of Qatar. These girls, aged between 15 and 19, had been talked about all over the world last year when news broke that they were able to assemble a low-cost lung ventilator to make up for the shortage of these machines in Afghan hospitals during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The young female students of Herat were able to reach safety and flee abroad, where they will be able to continue their studies. But for millions of Afghan girls and young women who have not had this fortune, the future looks bleak. In an interview published by *Time* in July 2021, teachers, students and local officials who live in areas controlled by the Taliban, even before their takeover of the rest of the country, said that they had prohibited access to schools to thousands of young girls, and teenagers in particular.

In the twenty years between the ousting of the Taliban by the US-led international coalition (2001) and their return to power, the number of girls enrolled in the first grade went from zero to 65% in 2011, after which there was an overall decline in the number of enrollments. Already in 2015 the percentage stood at 57%. Today only 37% of female adolescents can read and write, compared to 66% of their male peers. Unicef¹⁷ notes that 60% of the approximately 3.7 million children who do not attend school are female.

This situation is the result of a host of different factors: from widespread poverty to the high incidence of early marriages, from the lack of infrastructure to the high costs of education, pushing many families to favour the schooling of their male children to the detriment of female ones. A 2017 Human Rights Watch¹⁸ report highlighted the difficulties in accessing education for women in the country: "41% of schools do not have enough classrooms and many children live too far from the nearest school to be able to attend, a situation that especially penalizes the female students. School buildings are decrepit, often damaged, lacking desks and chairs. Overcrowding - compounded by the demand for separate classes for boys and girls - causes schools to divide their days into two or three shifts, resulting in a school day that is too short to cover the entire curriculum".

The Human Rights Watch report particularly criticizes the role of the government that "has not taken significant steps to implement the legislation on compulsory education", which requires all children to attend at least 9 years of school. This country has missed the opportunity not only for democracy, but also to provide quality education for Afghan children, especially girls.

Europe: more than 2 out of 10 girls are NEET

According to the latest Eurostat data¹⁹ from 2020, 17.6% of young people between 20 and 34 years of age fits into the NEET category ("*Neither in employment nor in education and*

¹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>

¹⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/17/i-wont-be-doctor-and-one-day-youll-be-sick/girls-access-education-afghanistan>

¹⁹ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#NEETs:_analysis_by_sex_and_age)

[title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#NEETs:_analysis_by_sex_and_age](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training#NEETs:_analysis_by_sex_and_age)

training’). i.e. boys and girls, young men and young women who don’t frequent university, aren’t undertaking other formative courses and are unemployed. This appears to be a prevalently female phenomenon: in 2020, 21.5% of girls aged between 20 and 34 fit into this category, as opposed to 13.8% of their male peers. In eight countries of the European Union, the gap between males and females is higher than 10%.

Amongst them, the gap sits between 11-13% in Bulgaria, Italy and Estonia, rises to 15-19% in Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary, and peaks at 24.2% in the Czech Republic. Among non-EU countries which are still analysed by Eurostat, there is also Turkey, where there are 33.1% more young NEET women than men. Eurostat highlights how the gender gap rises with age: for 20 to 24-year-olds, the percentage of young NEET women is only higher than men’s by 1.1%. It then grows to 8.5% for 25 to 29-year-olds, and peaks at 12.6% for 30 to 34-year-olds.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of 15 to 29-year-olds in Italy who fall under the NEET category has reached 2.1 million in 2020²⁰, which is 23.3% of the entire age group (up from 22.1% in 2019). This is the worst figure in Europe, with almost 10 points over the EU average of 27 (13.7%). And the situation is even more dire when concentrating particularly on women: one out of four girls (25.4%) fits into the NEET category, compared to the EU average of 15.4%.

Furthermore, even in Italy the effect of the female component on the total NEET figure grows with age: both in the 15 to 19-year-old and 20 to 24-year-old age groups, the gap between males and females is below 1% (moreover, a slight edge for females over males). The distance is far more apparent in the 25 to 29-year-old age group (11.9%) which then widens even further for 30 to 34-year-olds (19.7%).

The efforts of the National Youth Agency in the inclusion of NEETs

An important objective of the activities promoted by the National Youth Agency is inclusion. The principles of equality and inclusivity, fundamental values of the European Union, are highly ensured in the Erasmus+ programs and the European Solidarity Corps, which have been created in order to grant equal access for all.

Some young people, however, cannot equally benefit from these opportunities, because they encounter barriers of entry, have less access to education, training and in youth work, they abandon or don’t follow an educational, occupational or formative path.

A portion of this crowd is formed of these so-called NEETs, young people who don’t work or study. Between 2014 and 2020, the National Youth Agency has approved 185 projects that tackle the theme of NEETs. Such projects have been approved by 130 beneficiaries, allowing for the participation of 8527 participants.

The young people who fall into the NEET category, as well as other disadvantaged individuals, are the target groups for dedicated and specific attention.

For those operating in the territory, these activities represent a big opportunity to lead these disheartened youths towards a brighter future, to motivate them and kick-start them towards a short or long-term experience which will help them grow as individuals and,

20 https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/rubriche/altrenews/2021/04/14/eurostat-neet-italia-salgono-al-233-dato-piu-alto-in-ue_67434a3e-20f5-4a27-9378-8fa56f461a48.html

thanks to a participative approach, allows them to acquire soft skills which will improve their personal and professional prospects. These learning experiences have a strong potential for reintegration of young NEETs into society and in the creation and/or improvement of their learning and career paths.

Participating in projects regarding young people with lesser opportunities and NEETs, is owed to the precious work of organisations, agencies, institutions and operators who strive for the development of methodologies and strategies to reorient them towards an educational path or into the working world. For more information: agenziagiovani.it

Chapter 3

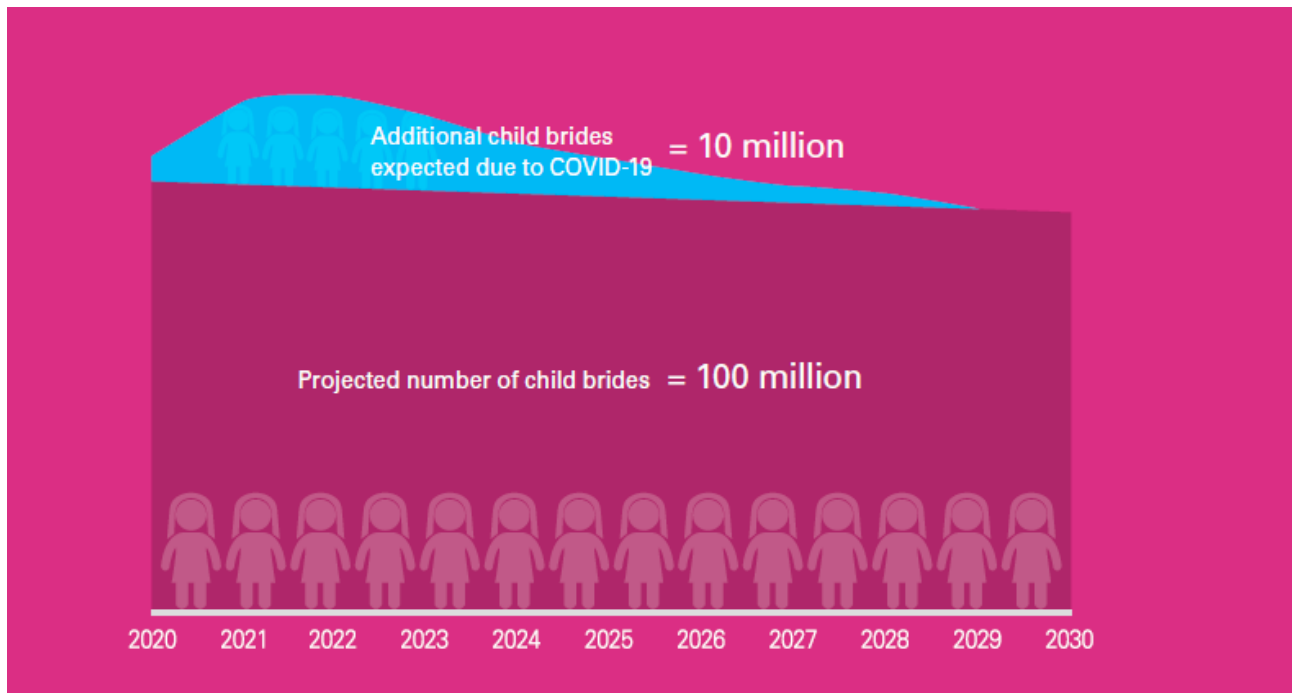
Baby brides: the impact of Covid-10 will last for an entire generation



“My family told me I could not give up such an offer: the boy who wanted to marry me came from a rich family”. Abeba, 14 years old, was pressured by her mother and her brothers into saying yes to her suitor and marrying. Thus, reducing the economical difficulties her family was facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She would like to be a doctor, but in Northern Ethiopia, where she lives, her future is uncertain. Rabi, 16, was able to keep going to a school in Gusau, Niger, but four of her best friends had to end their studies to get married and her mother thinks that now is her turn: “I never thought it would come this early”.

Covid-19 and the subsequent economic crisis have deeply shaped the life of hundreds of millions of people all over the world. However, for millions of girls, the consequences of the pandemic will keep affecting their entire lives: Unicef estimates that the number of baby brides will increase by

10 millions (compared with pre-pandemic figures) in the next 10 years²¹. Reverting a positive tendency that showed a significant reduction of premature marriages between 2000 and 2010.



Although it was clear in the last years that it would have been impossible to reduce to zero the number of baby brides by 2030 (the aim of Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 5), during the last ten years, approximately 25 million under-18-girls avoided a marriage thanks to the efforts of international organisations, small and medium NGOs and activists.

According to the NU data, in 2019, within the 20-24 age group, 1 in 5 girls (20,2% of the total) got married before being 18 years old. In the previous 10 years, the ratio was 1 in 4 girls (23,8%). The South Asian continent reported the most significant reduction in premature marriages, whereas the countries most at risk are in the sub-Saharan Africa, where 1 girl in 3 (34,5%) gets married before being 18 (data from 2019)²².

According to Unicef figures, had not pre-pandemic tendency changed, in 2030 there would have been approximately 100 million baby brides. But the effects of Covid-19 will make this number increase by 10 million by 2030. According to the forecasts by the UN children's fund, the majority of these marriages are supposed to be celebrated within a few years after the pandemic and involve older girls, primarily. Nonetheless, "the consequences of the pandemic will be having effects for the next 10 years, increasing the risks of premature marriages for girls who are now younger", Unicef warns.

The rise in premature marriages caused by Covid-19 represents a dangerous backward step along the difficult journey of ensuring that girls' human rights are respected: a teenager who is forced to get married (often with an older man) is more exposed to face abuse and domestic violence, to

²¹ "Covid-19. A threat to progress against child marriage", UNICEF <https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/>

²² <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>

develop sexually transmitted diseases and to deal with an adolescent pregnancy. Furthermore, the interruption of the educational path increases exponentially the difficulties to find a well-paid job and leave the cycle of poverty. Premature marriages, says Unicef, change profoundly the course of young brides' lives and affect the lives of their children. For this reason, the full effect of the pandemic will manifest itself for a generation.

Shifting the focus from the global dimension towards those countries where premature marriages are very common, the situation is even more alarming. The NGO BRAC estimates that, in Bangladesh, during 2020, an increase by 13% of premature marriages was recorded, due to Covid-19. The research, carried out through the program "*Gender Justice and Diversity*" by BRAC in 11 districts in the country, revealed the most significant rise in the last 25 years, as defined by the organisation²³.

In some districts in Malawi, in August 2020, the amount of premature marriages skyrocketed. According to the newspaper, "*The Telegraph*" and quoting the Ngo *Charity International*, between April and June 2020 the organisation's emergency number registered 699 premature marriages. An increase by 83%, as compared with the previous year²⁴. In Lebanon, Unicef reports a rise in premature marriages, linked to the economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, especially among Syrian refugees²⁵.

In the Indian state of Karnataka, according to estimates published by the National commission for protection of child's rights, 2,180 premature marriages were celebrated between April 2020 and January 2021²⁶.

Italy, a good few forced marriages registered

In 2006, Hina Saleem was murdered by her father because she fell in love with an Italian guy. In 2018, Sana Cheema, a 25-year-old Italo-Pakistani, was murdered by her father and her brother while she was visiting her country of origin; the motive for the murder was her rejection to an arranged marriage. May 2021: Saman Abbass, an 18-year-old Pakistani, disappeared into thin air: investigator suspect that she was murdered by her family because she refused a marriage and that her body was buried in the fields near Novellara, where the family resided.

Hina, Sana and Saman stories turned media and politician spotlight (briefly) on the phenomenon of forced marriages, present in Italy as well, yet not well explored and told about. On the other hand, Tiziana Dal Pra has observed the phenomenon carefully and has spent years with young victims. She is the founder and president of "Trama di terre" ("Lands narrative"), an association created in 2009 which, between 2011 and 2014, opened the first national shelter home for foreign teenagers escaping from forced marriages.

"We could define these women as "disobedient girls" who stand up to the family situation in which they grow up. A situation in which mothers, but also aunts, accepted an arranged marriage once and they take

²³ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2021/03/28/child-marriage-up-13-during-covid-19-pandemic-in-bangladesh>

²⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/women-and-girls/child-marriages-skyrocket-malawi-covid-19-closes-schools-figures/>

²⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/lebanons-crisis-increase-child-marriages/a-57531628>

²⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/activists-in-karnataka-fear-child-marriages-may-go-unnoticed-during-lockdown/article34545410.ece>

for granted that now these girls, born or grown up in Italy, do the same. For what concerns girls from Pakistan and Bangladesh, these marriages are often celebrated with cousins: this way the family maintains a strong control over the inheritance and the legacy. But, more importantly, over the girl's honour", Dal Pra explains. Therefore, it happens that, when a daughter rebels or just falls in love with a guy, not chosen by her family (it doesn't matter whether he is Italian or not), a series of mechanisms for controlling the girl and bringing her back within boundaries click. A mechanism which, in the worst case, ends in a murder.

"When compared to 10 years ago, focus and awareness are higher among social services workers, teachers and the police", Dal Pra explains. "However, there still are a series of issues. For instance, I think about the fact that many of these girls don't hold the Italian citizenship, and this triggers a series of issues if not they are not covered by the family's visa. Other than reiterating the importance of an ad-hoc training for all stakeholders, Dal Pra emphasises another area, often considered a sideline when speaking about forced marriages: "Who are the mother of these girls?", she asks. "When we read these news in newspapers, we see that these women don't go out and they barely speak Italian. Mothers have a big responsibility, but the society is guilty as well as it doesn't look at them and it makes them more invisible than what their countries of origin do".

"We can't underestimate the role played by the family network", Dal Pra adds. "Sometimes, a father is a bit more permissive and more supportive of her daughter. However, most of the time, there is another family member, for example a brother, who imposes his decision to keep intact the Family honour. Mothers, on the other hand, are often described as a fragile and passive person: typically committed to ensure the application of rules and to protect their daughters' honour. They often play the role of "guardians". This role is also played but her eldest sons.

The importance of networks

To fight against the activity of this network, as underlined by Tiziana Dal Pra, we need to create another network which includes local associations, social services, the police, courts. schools. *"It is necessary to train all workers and be aware that helping a girl who is escaping a forced marriage is not an easy process", she adds. Firstly, there are a series of signals that, when detected, can save the girl before it is too late: more control from the family (for example, the prohibition to participate in school trips and restrictions to go out), a decline in school performance, the announcement of a sudden trip to the parents' country of origin.*

If a girl decides to leave her family and searches for help, the first step is to transfer her to a protected structure and implement the possible precautions to avoid the girl to be located by her family. "Then, we need to focus on her feelings: nostalgia, guilt, feelings of these girls for their parents. We can't forget that in many cases we talk about teenagers, or very young girls. These girls find themselves in suspended between the culture of their countries of origin, which they want to preserve something about, and the Italian culture. For all these reasons and complexities, we need qualified professionals who stay by their side and support them during this journey", Dal Pra explains.

The admission and permanence in a protected structure represent the first step, but they are not enough and it's not possible to let the guard down. Because families will do everything to make girls return home by promising forgiveness and the possibility to "fix everything", or by sending audio messages from mothers and sisters in tears.

"The most important thing is to increase these girls' awareness about their rights as women, without falling into the trap of cultural relativism. We should not be afraid of a firm intervention in these subjects,

just because we have fear of being considered racists. Because we are not discussing about 'family issues' or 'cultural issues'. We are talking about rights", ends Tiziana Dal Pra. "These paths have never been easy and, most importantly, they last years because, in addition to finishing the school career, if necessary, these girls need help to achieve working autonomy. But our experience tells us that should the network work well and should we work in concert, we can achieve good results".

Italian legislation against forced marriages

The act 69/2019 (also known as "Red Code") has introduced the crime of forced or persuaded marriage into the Italian law. Whoever forces "through violence and threats" a person into marriage or civil union, against her/his will, by taking advantage of the subjective conditions of the affected person (vulnerability, psychological inferiority or necessity) and by taking advantage of the family, domestic or work relationships risks between 1 to 5 years of jail. Moreover, since forced marriages are often celebrated abroad, the crime is also punished when committed outside the national borders by Italian citizens or foreign citizens living in Italy, against girls and young ladies who are Italian or are foreign citizens based in Italy.

Since the implementation of the "Red code", the Italian Criminal Intelligence Analysis, supervised by the Criminal Police central administration has issued the first report on the phenomenon this year: from August 9th, 2019 until the first 5 months of 2021, 24 victims of force marriages were identified. Seven during the last five months of 2019, 8 during 2020 and nine between January and May 2021. 85% of victims were females. 27% were between 14 and 17 years old.

Learn from good practice

In July 2021, the organisation "No Peace Without Justice" published a study on premature marriages in Italy²⁷. The report, realized with to the support of "The Circle", resulted from an exploratory research which lays the foundation for a campaign supporting the fight against child marriages in Italy.

The objective of the study is to define and quantify, as much as possible, the phenomenon in Italy and in Europe from a socio-legal prospective. Therefore, the literal research allowed a critical analysis of the national and international legislative framework. This study analysed, as well, good practices adopted in Italy (by NGOs and associations) to prevent child marriages.

Unfortunately, as written in the text, this subject is discussed by a small number of organisations and represents a gap within the fight against gender-based violence. *"It is right to note that -as written in the report- many anti-violence centres don't deal with the phenomenon and, consequently, they don't hire qualified and competent personnel to monitor possible cases and they don't use specific protocols".*

The document drew up by "No Peace Without Justice" ends with a list of good practices adopted in other European countries which, with appropriate adjustments, can be implemented in Italy, too. Among various suggestions made, here are some:

- Passing a law that prohibits marriages before being 18 years old, without exception. This is happening already in Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark.

²⁷ No Peace Without Justice, *study on child marriages in Italy*, 2021

<http://www.npwj.org/sites/default/files/ressources/report-matrimoni-minoril-%20doppia-pagina.pdf>

- Adopting a national strategic plan focused on forced and/or child marriages. Switzerland, for instance, has launched a federal 5-year program against forced marriages, supervised by the State Secretariat for Migration.
 - The establishment of a dedicated national mechanism, like the “*Forced Marriage Unit*” in the United Kingdom which focuses on prevention and on people in danger inside the national territory.
 - The dissemination of clear, precise, reliable, up-to-date, accessible and multilingual information directed to victims and potential victims, shared by institutions on government web sites. Examples in this case are France, Norway and Sweden (in the latter case, the national police’s web site is the host site).
 - The dissemination of specific projects for the prevention in schools.
 - The improvement of the national anti-violence helpline, especially linguistically speaking. In Germany, for example, the service is available in 15 languages.
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Chapter 4

Ever younger mothers



Becoming a mother before even turning 10 years old. It is unthinkable for our society, but in Peru 26 girls aged 10 gave birth in 2020²⁸. In 2019, the Peruvian Ministry of Health's (*Registro del Certificado de Nacido Vivo*) or CNV counted 9 cases, but there has been a dramatic increase this year, which can undoubtedly be attributed to acts of sexual violence that occurred within the family during the pandemic. Peru was, in fact, one of those countries with the strictest and longest lockdown. The girls were not able to attend school for the whole school year and had to stay at home or at least in close proximity. A consubstantial number of childbirths occurred among young women in older age groups too: 1,155 young mothers aged between 11 and 14 (807 in 2019) and 47,369 aged between 15 and 19 (38,168)²⁹ in 2020. Obviously, these are just the official data, but many pregnancies have ended in clandestine abortions. In Peru it's not allowed to terminate a pregnancy, except for very few reasons and sexual abuse is not among them.

Peru wasn't the only country to register a higher number of early pregnancies caused by Covid-19 epidemic. In the Philippines, the phenomenon of early pregnancies was declared a 'national emergency' in 2019. A research conducted by the United Nations estimated a surge of 18,000 unwanted teenage pregnancies at the end of 2020 compared to the previous year³⁰.

28 <https://saludconlupa.com/noticias/el-nmero-de-nias-que-se-convirtieron-en-madres-en-el-per-se-triplic-en-2020/>

29 <https://ojo-publico.com/2139/ninas-madres-la-emergencia-suspendida-por-la-pandemia>

30 <https://philippines.unfpa.org/en/news/significant-rise-maternal-deaths-and-unintended-pregnancies-feared-because-covid-19-unfpa-and>

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of greatest concern. Here the majority of boys and girls do not attend school. The highest rates of early pregnancies among young girls and women under 18 years old were recorded here, even before the pandemic broke out.

According to media reports in Kenya, some 152,000 teenage girls got pregnant during the first three-month *lockdown*³¹, 40% more than the monthly average of a country which was already registering a high number of early pregnancies before the outbreak of the pandemic: one in five girls aged between 15-19 was pregnant or already a mother³².

According to data provided by the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare in Malawi (a small Southern African state), around 13,000 girls became pregnant, and around 40,000 were married before the age of 18 during the six months when schools were closed in the country³³. In Zimbabwe, where the government imposed a new lockdown from January 2021 and schools remained closed for most of 2020, the authorities reported a sharp increase in early pregnancies: between January and February 2021, about 5,000 girls found out they were pregnant³⁴.

An estimate of one million girls will not return to school in the country because they got pregnant during the closure of schools caused by Covid-19 outbreak. The cost of these pregnancies and the subsequent dropping out of school by new mothers is estimated at around 10 billion dollars³⁵.

One of the main obstacles that baby mothers have to face when returning to school is the prejudice and stigma of pregnancies outside of marriage, even when they are a result of a sexual abuse. Parents and family members often push very young mothers to stay at home to hide the 'shame' of a pregnancy and protect the family's reputation. In many African countries, teenage mothers are publicly stigmatised - in the media, by politicians, and by local leaders - to the extent that in some communities there is a deep-seated notion that allowing them to continue their studies might somehow 'normalise' teenage pregnancies and that 'forgiving' girls (by allowing them to return to school) might trigger a domino effect and increase the level of early pregnancies.

Sometimes these prejudices take the form of laws and policies that prohibit pregnant girls from returning to school. That's still the case today in Togo, Equatorial Guinea, and Tanzania. "*Some governments still encourage abusive practices such as forced medical examinations to verify pregnancy status,*" reports Human Rights Watch. "*In other countries, policies are not clear. Even where some laws and policies allow people to return to school, the level of protection and their implementation varies*"³⁶. Girls are not always informed about the possibility of going back to school and, when they do it, they are not put in a position to balance their studies with caring for their newborns, for example, by ensuring space and time for breastfeeding. Moreover, the law itself often places further obstacles in the path of these girls: in Senegal, for example, any young teenage mother who wishes to return to school must present a medical certificate attesting to her health and fitness to study. In Malawi, pregnant students are immediately suspended from school, though they can be

31 <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/rise-in-teenage-pregnancies-during-kenya-lockdown/?template=next>

32 <https://ncpd.go.ke/2021/02/26/teenage-pregnancy-in-kenya/>

33 <https://www.unicef.org/malawi/stories/schoolgirl-shakes-covid-19-regret>

34 <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/zimbabwe-reports-major-rise-teen-pregnancies-during-pandemic>

35 World Vision International, Covid-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied, 2020

https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Covid19%20Aftershocks_Access%20Denied_small.pdf

36 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/15/time-protect-education-adolescent-mothers-across-africa>

readmitted the following year provided that they submit a request to the Ministry of Education and to the school they wish to attend³⁷.

Two more factors may have contributed to the growth of early pregnancies: the increase in early marriages and the many challenges for girls (and women in general) to access family planning services to obtain modern contraceptives. According to data released in March 2021 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), about 12 million women had difficulty accessing contraceptives due to restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 outbreak. This would have resulted in about 1.4 million unwanted pregnancies. The estimate surveyed 115 low- and middle-income countries³⁸.

Younger girls and teenagers are among the most affected groups. In fact, even before Covid-19 emergency outbreak, institutions were unable to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of teenage girls and young women in low- and middle-income countries.

According to Guttmacher Institute's calculations³⁹, there are around 32 million girls aged between 15 and 19 in low- and middle-income countries who want to avoid pregnancy. Only part of them, however, has access to what the WHO calls 'modern contraceptives': condoms, contraceptive pills, the IUD, or other intrauterine devices, and the administration of contraceptives by injection or patches. Nearly 14 million are forced to resort to less effective methods. *"This unfilled need for access to modern contraceptives is much higher among adolescent girls (43%) than among women up to the age of 49 (24%)".*

"Adolescent girls face many obstacles to accessing contraception, including fear of making it public that they are sexually active (in the case of single girls) and social pressure to have children (in the case of married girls)," the report says. "An estimated 21 million teenage pregnancies occur each year in low- and middle-income countries, 50% of which are unintended. There are about 5.7 million abortions, and most of them are unsafe abortions".

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that just over half of these pregnancies (around 12 million) result in the birth of a child. Over the past 20 years, the fertility rate among teenage girls (i.e., the number of births per thousand girls aged between 15 and 19) has fallen by 11.6%⁴⁰.

"However, profound differences remain between regions: in 2018, the fertility rate in South-East Asia was 7.1 while in Central Africa it was at 129.5," WHO writes. "Although the fertility rate among teenage girls is declining, the number of children born to teenage mothers has not decreased due to population growth".

Precocious pregnancies in Italy

According to the Research and Monitoring Service Childhood and Adolescence Area of the *Istituto degli Innocenti*, based on ISTAT data, in 2019 the children born in Italy to underage mothers (between 15 and 17 years of age) were 1,086 out of a total of over 420,000 births. This confirms the decline in births to underage mothers compared to 1,218 in 2018 and 1,390 in 2017. Sicily is the most affected Italian region by this phenomenon, with 270 children born to underage mothers (up to 17 years old), following Campania (226), Apulia (120), and Lombardy (113).

37 World Vision International, Covid-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied, 2020

https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Covid19%20Aftershocks_Access%20Denied_small.pdf

38 https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID_Impact_FP_V5.pdf

39 <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/adding-it-up-investing-in-sexual-reproductive-health-adolescents>

40 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

Five children born in 2019 were born to mothers under the age of 15 (two of foreign origin). There were 29 births to 15-year-old mothers (7 to mothers of foreign origin, 22 of Italian origin) while 365 births to 16-year-old girls. Here too, most of the mothers are of Italian origin (296 children against 69 born to foreign mothers). Lastly, there were 687 children born to 17-year-old mothers (of whom 545 were born to young girls of Italian origin). We also include, for a better picture, the number of children born to mothers who were 18 years old at the time of birth: 1,429 (of which 1,095 from Italian mothers).

Adopting the WHO definition, which defines as 'precocious' girls up to the age of 19, the total number of children born to girls aged between 15 and 19 rises to 5,103 (of which 3,710 born to Italian mothers). This number is very similar to the number of voluntary terminated pregnancies recorded in the same age group: 5,003. While there were 129 voluntary abortions among under-14s.

With 833 procedures, Lombardy is the region with the highest number of abortions in the 15-19 age group, followed by Lazio (508), Apulia (499), and Sicily (446).

Milan: Extremely precocious pregnancies on the rise

The professionals at SAGA (*Servizio di accompagnamento alla maternità in adolescenza* / Teenage pregnancy support services) in Milan⁴¹ start to realise with some concern the consequences two lockdowns had on girls. Particularly on younger ones. *"We started to observe an increase in teenage pregnancies, in particular an increase in extremely early pregnancies,"* explains Margherita Moioli, Developmental Neuropsychomotricity Therapist and SAGA spokesperson.

Girls between 13 and 21 years of age are referred to the facility.

In 2020, SAGA took in one 13-year-old girl, one 14-year-old girl, and eight 15-year-old girls. Ten girls out of a total of 55 adolescents and young women up to the age of 21 have been taken into care by SAGA during 2020. This may seem like a small number, but in reality, explains Moioli, it is a frighteningly high number considering that 'usually, we don't have more than five cases a year in the city'. The fear is that numbers from 2021 will show the same (worrying) trend.

Over the years, SAGA has been working at full capacity, reaching its limits: in 2019 there were 65 girls in care, in 2020 there were 55 and at the end of June 2021 there were 25 more. With the prospect of reaching the same numbers as in 2020 at the end of the year. In addition, there are more difficulties linked to the increasing number of very young women who need more support in their journey towards making conscious choices and motherhood.

"We only have a few months to lead a young girl to make appropriate and considered choices, whether she decides to keep the child or chooses the foster care option instead," explains Moioli. *"It is always fundamental to involve the social services, the health services, the juvenile court and the family. And without ever losing sight of our main objective: safeguarding the well-being of the girl and the child. Both in the present and in the future".* The months the team has available are never the regular nine months of pregnancy, as young and very young mothers-to-be often arrive at SAGA many weeks after they became pregnant.

41 Servizio afferente all'Unità Operativa di neuropsichiatria infantile 2 dell'ASST Santi Paolo e Carlo di Milano.

Unfortunately, for many of these girls facing pregnancy and motherhood also means having to interrupt their studies. *"Sometimes, even the youngest ones decide to leave school"* says Moioli. *"And for all of them, the possibility of resuming or continuing their studies depends solely on having someone who can look after the child"*.

Those families who can support very young mothers and grandchildren by paying for a nursery or a baby sitter are just a minority. In fact, most of the time the grandparents are still young and working. Furthermore, these young mothers seldom get access to public nurseries, and the result is clear: the girl ends up giving up studying and stays at home. At least until the child can go to the kindergarten. *"But then the damage is done, and after a three-year break it's very difficult to resume studies,"* explains Moioli. *"This is why we are working with institutions to raise awareness on the need to place children of teenage mothers in nurseries. On one hand, to give the girls the opportunity to study, train and build up their working autonomy, and on the other hand to offer the newborns an additional element of protection. For a teenage mother, the support of an educator can be crucial in caring for her child."*

With this in mind, Terre des Hommes offers support to SAGA baby mothers by distributing basic necessities (food and baby products such as bottles, nappies, etc.) and, starting in autumn, we will provide them with a baby parking service, recreational activities, and support for mothers and children in the new Spazio Indifesa in zone 8 of Milan (near San Carlo Hospital).

HIV and AIDS

Teenage girls and young women are disproportionately affected by the HIV virus. According to the latest UNAIDS report, 280,000 girls and young women aged between 15 and 24 contract the HIV virus every year (out of an estimated 460,000 people in the same age group)⁴². Although adolescent girls and young women only represent 10% of the total population in sub-Saharan African countries, one in four new HIV infections occurred in this age group in 2019⁴³.

"Every day about 460 girls become HIV-positive and an estimated 50 die from AIDS-related consequences", reads an article published in *The Lancet*⁴⁴. *"Gender inequalities, violence and poverty increase the vulnerability of girls and young women to the virus"*. Despite the efforts to fight the spread of HIV, women and girls account for almost 50% of more than 38 million people living with HIV globally. According to the authors of the article, if AIDS is to be defeated by 2030, women and girls must be a priority when fighting the epidemic. If nothing is done in the coming years, we will see an increase in infections as more and more adolescent girls enter adulthood.

But what are the factors that make girls and young women particularly vulnerable to HIV?

"According to surveys conducted in Eastern and Southern African countries, poorer and less educated girls have less ability to negotiate the use of a condom compared to their more affluent or educated peers," *The Lancet* points out.

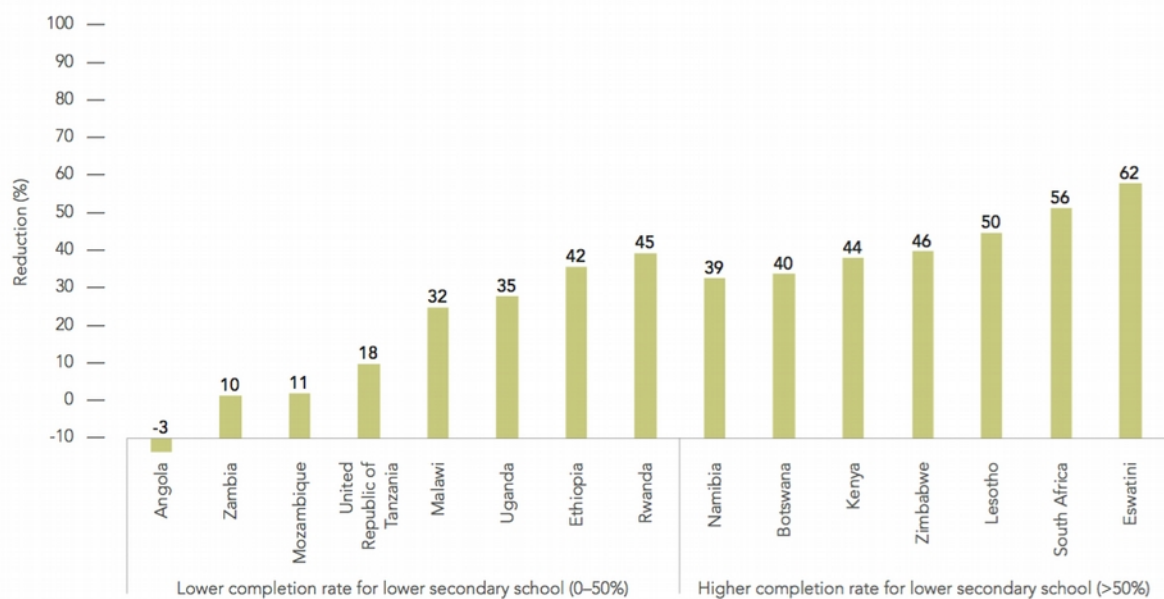
However, there is one factor that can play a key role and 'protect' African girls and young women: schools. *"There is a correlation between people who have used a condom during their last sexual intercourse and people with a lower secondary school degree in Eastern and Southern African countries,"* UNAIDS points out. The best results in fighting the HIV were obtained in those countries with the highest rates of female school attendance and completion of lower secondary education.

42 UNAIDS, Data 2020 https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/young-people-and-hiv_en.pdf

43 <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/unaids-2020-aids-data-book.pdf>

44 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)32552-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32552-6/fulltext)

Relative reduction in new HIV infections since 2010 among adolescent girls and young women (ages 15–24 years), by completion rate for lower secondary school, eastern and southern Africa



Source: UNAIDS epidemiological estimates, 2020 (see <https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

Chapter 5

Menstruation and Period Poverty



According to World Bank estimates, there are around 500 million women and girls worldwide⁴⁵ who do not have access to adequate services for handling their personal hygiene during menstruation. They are also unable to protect themselves with suitable products (such as sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, etc.). For example, 80% of women and girls in Bangladesh are forced to use rags, old clothes or similar makeshift solutions.

For the youngest girls, a lack of response to this basic need can have long-term consequences and affect things such as school attendance, early school leaving and even result in dropping out of school. In Bangladesh, 35% of female students aged between 10 and 19 interviewed for a study on this topic admitted to skipping one or more days of school during their period⁴⁶. In India the percentage rises to 40%, while a research from UNICEF México shows that in Latin America 43% of female students prefer not going to school when they're on their period. *"If a student decides to skip one or two days of school per month, by the end of the year she will be behind academically. The issue of menstrual hygiene is linked to many other factors which can cause girls who attend high school to abandon their studies,"* explains Paola Gómez, Education Officer at UNICEF México⁴⁷.

Several studies conducted in Ethiopia show that the percentage of girls who miss school from one to four days during their period varies between 43% and 54%. *"In a study, 57.8% of girls said that their period had a negative effect on their academic performance: 90% do not feel comfortable going to school when they're on their period and 20% have skipped exams and tests,"*⁴⁸ as stated

45 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/05/25/menstrual-hygiene-management>

46 <http://www.populationmedicine.eu/Menstrual-hygiene-practices-and-school-absenteeism-among-adolescent-girls-in-Bangladesh.133641.0.2.html>

47 <https://observatory.tec.mx/edu-news/absenteeism-menstruation>

48 <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0248825>

in an article published on the “PLOS ONE” portal, an Open Access editorial project for scientific publications.

Periods hinder school attendance not much because of the physical symptoms associated with this time of the month, but rather due to the lack of suitable bathrooms (i.e., those equipped with running water and which ensure the necessary privacy) and the difficulty girls experience in buying basic intimate hygiene products.

For example, studies conducted in Bangladesh and Ethiopia⁴⁹ highlight how school absenteeism is higher among teenage girls who need to use rags or other makeshift materials to deal with their period or wash reusable sanitary pads without the usage of specific products, or those which need to be dried in places with no direct light or suitable air circulation. These conditions can lead to infections, which in turn reduce school attendance in addition to causing serious damage to the health of these girls. On the other hand, the use of disposable sanitary towels or washable sanitary towels which have been used appropriately (i.e., washed with antiseptic soap and correctly dried out) can reduce infections and, as a result, maintain steady levels of school attendance.

Not just in the Global South

Although the problem is mainly widespread in middle and low income countries, in Europe and the United States “*period poverty*” (i.e., the inability to access or purchase intimate hygiene products) is also a barrier to many girls’ education. Among young American women (aged 18-24) enrolled in universities who took part in an online survey carried out in April 2019, 14.2% said they had experienced conditions of period poverty over the past year. Another 10% experienced them every month⁵⁰. The most common way of dealing with this scenario is borrowing sanitary towels (72.8%). Following on from that, the responses also indicate the use of other materials (52.6%) and the use of sanitary towels or tampons for longer than the suggested period of time (48.3%). Before the Covid-19 epidemic, one in ten girls in the UK were unable to afford sanitary products and towels and one in seven had to borrow sanitary towels from a friend.

This is a situation made even more difficult by the lockdowns imposed in many countries and the economic crisis which followed the pandemic. A study carried out by the “Menstrual Hygiene Day” platform in October 2020 showed that 47% of girls and women in 160 countries have faced major difficulties in obtaining sanitary towels⁵¹. During the lockdown in the UK, among girls in the 14-21 age group, 11% were unable to afford sanitary towels and were forced to use makeshift materials such as toilet paper (54%), socks (11%) and other fabrics (8%). Even paper or newspapers (6%) were used⁵².

In Italy, the **Stop Tampon Tax** campaign continues and aims to reduce the VAT rate on sanitary towels to 22%, equal to the one applied to luxury goods. In 2019, the government reduced the rate to 5%, but only for compostable and biodegradable sanitary towels, which are more expensive and therefore used only by a small proportion of women.

49 <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-1118>

50 <https://bmcfwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-020-01149-5>

51 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/nov/16/period-poverty-covid-pandemic-uk-crisis-charity-menstrual-products>

52 <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-coronavirus-reportpdf/download?token=gddEAzIz>

Chapter 6

Working girls: an increased workload during the pandemic



One in ten minors around the world is forced to work. In absolute terms: 160 million minors, 63 million of which are female children and young girls. Unfortunately, the numbers are increasing: as UNICEF and the ILO⁵³ (International Labour Organization) denounced in the report “*Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*”. Since 2016 developments in child labour prevention have stalled, whereas in the previous 20 years successful outcomes had been achieved. “The percentage of girls forced to work has not changed in the last four years, while, in absolute numbers, there has been an increase of 8 million,” reads the report. This data is likely to get even worse following the Covid-19 epidemic, which by 2022 could force another 9 million children to drop out of school in order to start working.

Some of the improvements achieved between 2000 and 2016 which particularly benefitted working girls include: their percentage shifted from 22.5% in 2000 to 8.4% in 2016, although UN agencies fear the economic consequences of the pandemic may “erode” these positive results and see many girls exploited in heavy labour which is unsuitable for their age and harmful for their development.

Child labour is a phenomenon which has always affected boys more than girls: worldwide, 11% of male children and boys aged between 5 and 17 work, while the percentage falls to 7.8% for female

⁵³ International Labour Office and United Nations Children’s Fund, *Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*, New York, 2021 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-labour-2020-global-estimates-trends-and-the-road-forward/>

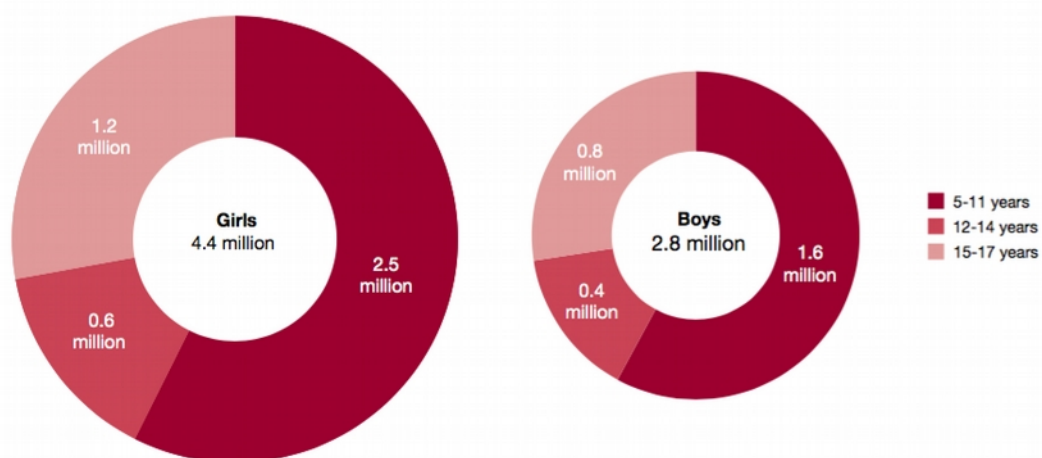
children and girls. But if we expand the definition of child labour to also take into account the minors who carry out housework for over 21 hours per week, the “gap” between males and females in the 5-14 age range is reduced by half: the percentage of boys actually goes from 10.9% to 12.5% and the percentage of girls increases from 8.1% to 10.9%.

Housework can include different activities that girls and boys carry out within their own household without getting paid: from cleaning rooms to preparing food, to looking after younger siblings or other family members or other domestic activities. Once the number of hours taken to complete these activities exceeds 21 per week, according to UNICEF and the ILO these activities amount to child labour as soon as it becomes difficult if not impossible to attend school successfully.

A total of 7.1 million girls and boys do over 21 hours of housework per week: in absolute numbers, the number of females surpasses that of men: we are looking at 4.4 million girls, while the number of boys comes to around 2.8 million. More than half of girls who do over 21 hours per week of housework (2.5 million) are aged between 5 and 11, which amounts to outright slavery.

Worldwide, 7.1 million children are engaged in forms of domestic work that constitute child labour

Fig 19. Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour in domestic work, by age and sex



Note: Due to rounding, age-specific numbers for girls do not add up to the total.

The sector with the highest rates of child labour is agriculture: 70% of working girls work in the fields, both those cultivated by their own families and commercial plantations or agro-industrial plants. Just 5.5% of girls work in industrial activities (compared to 13.4% of their male peers) and the biggest proportion of female labour after that carried out in the fields is found in the services sector (17.3%), followed by domestic work (6.9%).

Unsurprisingly, child labour is a major obstacle to education. 32.8% of girls who work do not attend school and for those who perform treacherous works (any activity carried out in an unsafe or unhealthy environment or which uses dangerous machinery) this percentage rises to 40%.

“The majority of girls who work do so because their families depend on their earnings, on what they produce or on the housework they do (which includes work for which they are not paid, carried out at home for the most part by girls) in order to make ends meet. Economic problems or the loss of a parent may increase the likelihood of a minor starting work”, reads the report. “Even before the Covid-19 epidemic, almost one in three children in medium and low income countries come from families who live below the poverty line. The pandemic has exacerbated child poverty, with an increase in 2020 of over 142 million in the number of children in low income families”. This figure will join over 582 million children living in poverty registered in 2019. In these conditions, it is highly likely that families will resort to their children (both male and female) working in order to overcome the economic difficulties caused by the pandemic.

The pandemic and housework

One of the consequences of Covid-19 which has been analysed and documented is the increase in domestic workload on the backs of women. This situation has affected even the youngest girls: a survey by the ONG “Their World” among British boys and girls aged between 14 and 24 has brought to light how the latter have spent more time on domestic activities compared to their male peers, taking valuable time away from their education. Two thirds of the female participants (66%) said they had spent more time cooking for their family members; among boys of the same age group, only 31% said they had experienced the same situation. 69% spent more time on cleaning activities (compared to 58% of men), shopping (52% compared to 49%) and looking after their siblings (28% compared to 16%)⁵⁴.

54 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/girls-doing-more-housework-in-covid-lockdown-than-boys>

Chapter 7

Trafficking, more and more little girls among the intercepted victims



Covid-19 has enormously amplified the vulnerabilities of women and girls and expose them to the risk of falling victim to human traffickers, of being sold and forced into prostitution or working in conditions of slavery, due to the increase in extreme poverty and the closure of schools.

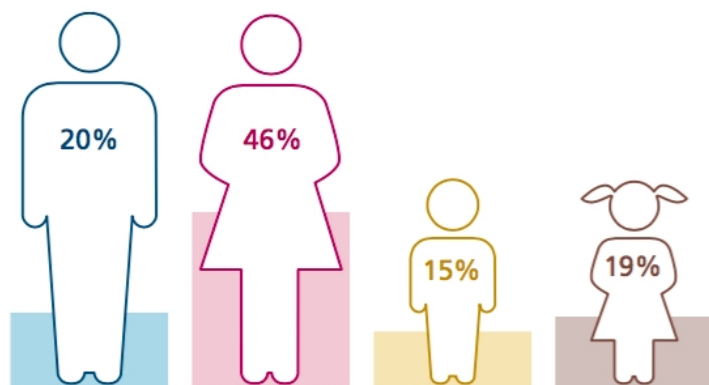
According to the recent report⁵⁵ conducted by the UNODC (the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention) it is essential that to act as soon as possible to prevent further increase of the number of trafficking victims as consequences of the pandemic.

The latest data from the United Nations agency once again showed that most of the 48,000 intercepted victims of trafficking in the world are female: 46% are adult women, 19% are little girls or girls under the age of 18. In absolute terms, the most significant number of female minor victims of trafficking were intercepted in North America (2,053), in second place is Europe (1,703), followed by South Asia (1,573) and sub-Saharan Africa (1,558). *"The 2018 data (the latest available Ed.) confirm the changes that have been taking place for 15 years regarding the age and gender of victims of trafficking"*, states UNODC. In proportion, fewer adult women are intercepted than in the past (they were 74% of the victims identified in 2004 against 46% in 2018). While the number

⁵⁵ UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, January 2021 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

of baby girls and girls has increased since 2004 to settle between 2011 and 2018 at an average of 20% of the total victims intercepted.

FIG. 2 Shares of detected victims of trafficking in persons, by age group and sex,* 2018 (or most recent)



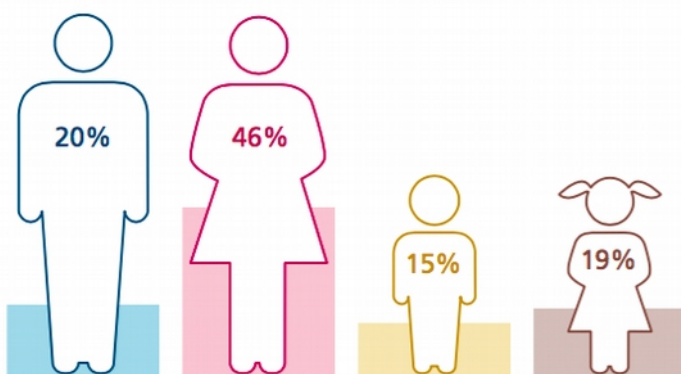
Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Sent into prostitution

Most female child victims (72%) are trafficked for sexual exploitation, 21% become victims of forced labour, while the remaining 7% are subjected to other forms of exploitation such as beggary or forced marriages. The preferred target for the criminals who run the trafficking and exploitation networks are mainly girls and boys belonging to the poorer classes, those who live in dysfunctional families or those who have no family care.

Globally, the share of minor victims of trafficking has reached 34% (19% are female and 15% are male) but in low-income countries the percentage rises to 50% and most (46%) are victims of labour exploitation.

Shares of detected victims of trafficking in persons, by age group and sex,* 2018 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

In sub-Saharan African countries (where child labour is particularly widespread), girls are trafficked more often to be exploited in plantations, mines or to work as maids or peddles, but they are more difficult to identify, in fact they represent 27% of the total number of intercepted victims of trafficking (against 37% of male peers).

The phenomenon of trafficking of little girls and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation is concentrated, however, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean where almost 45% of the victims intercepted are little girls and girls. Followed by East Asia (27%), North America (20%) and Western Europe (less than 15%).

Sold as "wives"

There is also another form of trafficking - difficult to quantify - which involves China in particular: where girls and young women from neighbouring countries (Cambodia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Nepal, Laos) trafficked and sold as "wives", particularly to men living in rural areas. The so-called "one-child policy" combined with a decade-long practice of selective abortions against girls have led to a serious gender imbalance: it is estimated that "missing" women in China are between 30 and 40 million.

The American NGO Human Rights Watch ⁵⁶ has analysed in particular the trafficking involving girls from Myanmar, who are deceived by self proclaimed "brokers" who promise them well-paid jobs in China. But once they cross the border, the girls find themselves at the mercy of their traffickers who sell them to families capable of paying between 3,000 to 13,000 dollars. Their task: give birth to sons as soon as possible.

Girls on the Run

Trafficking networks are often intertwined with migration routes. Children and teenagers - of both sexes - can be victims of trafficking, both within the borders of their own country or while trying to reach another. "Many children who travel alone and use irregular channels rely on smugglers, despite the risk of being exploited and trafficked", reports Unicef⁵⁷.

According to Unicef estimates, in 2020 there were about 35.5 million children - up to the age of 18 - living in a country other than the one in which they were born (and the male children exceed their female peers by 1.2 million). The numbers are on the rise compared to 2000, when there were 23.9 million young migrants.

Those who leave their homes - alone, or following their family - often do so for a specific reason (for example, to reunite with family members or to look for a better job), but there is also an important share of boys and girls fleeing wars and conflicts: in 2020 there were 10 million young refugees (including 4.9 million girls) who left their country of origin, while another 23.3 million were internally displaced (11.3 million of which were young girls).

The Unicef report demonstrates how "males and females can be driven to take on a migration path for different reasons". Practices such as child marriage and genital mutilation can lead girls to search for an alternative (or for safety). A research conducted in South Sudan has shown that

⁵⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/31/chinas-bride-trafficking-problem>

⁵⁷ "Uncertain pathways", Unicef, August 2021 <https://data.unicef.org/resources/uncertain-pathways-how-gender-shapes-the-experiences-of-children-on-the-move/>

women and girls from countries where the level of gender discrimination is higher tend to migrate more than those who live in a country with lower levels of discrimination.

Chapter 8

STEM and girls, an increasingly indispensable pairing for the future



In the coming years, the world of work will undergo profound changes, and girls need to be prepared not to miss out on valuable job opportunities. Transformations can (also) be very trivial: in England, for example, the installation of automatic checkouts in shops led to the cutting of one in four cashiers between 2011 and 2017. Many of them were women and girls.

"While many low-skilled jobs are being automated, workers with high levels of education and skills will be increasingly sought after," warns UNESCO⁵⁸, citing a study conducted in England between 2011 and 2017 by the Office for National Statistics, which found that women accounted for 70% of the workforce in sectors considered to be at high risk of automation, but only 43% in less risky ones. *"Women cannot miss the race for the jobs of the future,"* reads the report. *According to the United Nations, women will lose five jobs for every job gained through Industry 4.0, while among men the ratio is three jobs lost for every job gained."*

The latest edition of the *Gender Gap Report*⁵⁹ estimates that it will take 267.6 years to close the employment gap between men and women if not to take effective measures urgently. Aiming at training girls in STEM disciplines (an acronym that stands for *Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics*) and their subsequent employment in these sectors is key to close or at least reduce this gap.

58 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375429>

59 World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Report, 2021 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021#report-nav>

The gap begins at school

To achieve this goal, however, it is necessary to take action from the earliest years of education, not only in the western countries but especially in low- and middle-income ones. UNICEF warns: efforts to prepare girls and young women for equal participation in the world of work, including STEM fields, must be accelerated. Because the global education system has allowed gender differences to be perpetuated, particularly affecting the poorest and most marginalised girls⁶⁰. Not only because a huge number of girls and young women do not attend a school or are at high risk of dropping out, but also because the stereotypes that portray boys as 'better suited' and 'more talented' in mathematics and science are already being realised at school. While the education of females (when it goes beyond primary school) is directed by teachers and parents towards other disciplines.

In sub-Saharan African countries, primary school girls perform worse than their male counterparts in mathematics, the same for adolescent girls in South-East Asian countries. In what is referred to in the Anglo-Saxon system as 'Sixth Form' (age between 11 and 12), only in 12 out of 42 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean do girls achieve similar or better results in mathematics than their male peers. In addition, UNICEF points out that girls in low- and middle-income countries are particularly disadvantaged in acquiring basic digital skills. In Ghana, for example, 16% of adolescent boys have these skills compared to 7% of girls.

As to university, the gap is confirmed: globally, only 18% of girls attend STEM-related universities compared to 35% of their male peers⁶¹.

And even among researchers in science, women account for less than 30% of the total globally. The average ranges from 19% in South Asia to 23% in East Asia, 30% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 32% in North America and Western Europe. Up to 45% in Latin America⁶².

The gender gap in the world of work (today and tomorrow)

From school and university, this gender inequality is transferred to the workplace. A study conducted by the World Economic Forum and LinkedIn⁶³, between 2019 and 2020, analysed the emerging jobs in the labour market of 20 countries and identified 99 of them, divided into eight categories according to the skills profile required. *"The data point to a major challenge for the future of gender equality: only two of the eight clusters identified have gender parity, and many show a serious under-representation of women"*. The gender gap is particularly deep in sectors requiring innovative technical skills such as cloud computing (where women represent only 14% of the workforce), engineering (20%), data analysis, and artificial intelligence (32%).

Although these sectors are very attractive to young workers, *"at the current level, these inflows do not allow the gap between males and females to close"*, reads the report, which highlights that the growth of the female component in these sectors between February 2018 and February 2021 has been extremely low, if not absent. The 'Product development' cluster saw an increase in the female

⁶⁰ UNICEF, Towards an equal future: Reimagining Girls' Education Through STEM, 2020

<https://www.unicef.org/media/84046/file/Reimagining-girls-education-through-stem-2020.pdf>

⁶¹ *Ibidem*

⁶² <https://gearingroles.eu/international-day-of-women-and-girls-in-science-how-can-we-promote-gender-equality-in-stem/>

⁶³ World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Report, 2021 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/in-full/gggr2-gender-gaps-in-jobs-of-tomorrow>

presence of just 1.7%, while in the 'Cloud computing' and 'Data and artificial intelligence' clusters there was a drop of 0.2%.

There were more than 6.3 million women scientists in Europe in 2019, 41% of the total 15.4 million employed in these fields⁶⁴.

The situation in Italy

In Italy, girls account for 55% of the total number of university students enrolled in the 2018/2019 academic year. But only 37% in STEM degree courses. *"From one hundred girls enrolled in university, 82 were attending non-science degree courses, and 18 were studying STEM disciplines"*, reads the report by Talents Venture and STEAMiamoci⁶⁵ on the Gender Gap in STEM faculties. However, the distribution within the individual degree courses is not homogeneous: female university students predominantly (71%) populate the health and paramedical group (represented by the human nutrition sciences degree course), the geobiology and biotechnology group (65%), the chemical-pharmaceutical group (56%) and the architecture courses (56%). In contrast, the degree courses enclosed in the statistical group are close to parity (41%). However, the gap remains wide in all engineering faculties and also in the science, mathematics, and physics groups.

How much is a degree worth? Less if you are a woman

On average, girls have higher graduation grades than men (103.8 vs. 102), and even in faculties where they are less represented, the results are the same. However, the Almalaurea report⁶⁶ on the employment status of graduates also records "significant and persistent" gender inequalities for 2020.

Among second-level graduates, five years after graduating, women are less employed than men (84.8% compared to 89.8%), have fewer permanent contracts (52.1% compared to 58.1%), and earn less (the average female salary is €1,467 compared to €1,715 for male). Young women with children are particularly affected. *"The employment differential five years after graduation even rises to 21.4 percentage points among those who have children: isolating those who were not working at graduation, the employment rate is 91.5% for men compared with 70.1% for women"*, stays the Almalaurea document.

The gap (albeit reduced) also remains among graduates in those disciplines that have a greater impact on the labour market. When they go into engineering, five years after graduation males have a higher employment rate (94.7% vs. 91.9%), more permanent contracts (79.5% vs. 76.3%), and higher average salaries: 1,857 euros per month net against 1,692 euros per month net. The *gender pay gap* to the detriment of the female component is presented in all the degree groups surveyed by the Almalaurea report: from the health professions to those in the linguistic group, from economics and statistics to literary courses, emerging as real discrimination that is all too often accepted as inevitable.

64 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210210-1>

65 Osservatorio Talents Venture e STEAMiamoci sul Gender Gap nelle facoltà STEM con Assolombarda, 2020 <https://www.talentsventure.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/032020-Osservatorio-Talents-Venture-e-Steamiacomoci.pdf>

66 Consorzio Interuniversitario Almalaurea, Indagine Gender Gap 2021 https://www.almalaurea.it/sites/almalaurea.it/files/docs/news/focus_indagine_gender_gap_2021.pdf

Indifesa stories

Girls be brave!

"To an 18-year-old girl I would say: do what you love. Be brave. And I say this years after not having followed this advice. When I finished high school I wanted to study logic: a rather strange subject straddling mathematics, philosophy and computer science. I gave up computer science because it was not considered a particularly 'feminine' subject. So I took a degree in Philosophy and then a PhD in Logic: at the first lecture I felt at home, as if I had finally met someone who spoke my language. I was the only girl, but it never bothered me". Serena Delli is a young graduate from the Milan Polytechnic and a member of the 'Women in logic' association. *"Don't let the judgement of an external person stop you: it's better to err on the side of your head than to be influenced by others",* says Giulia Marigliano, a graduate in environmental and territorial engineering from the Alma Mater Studiorum in Bologna. *"Choosing a university is an important step, but you can go back: it is a mistake to foreclose a choice for fear of making a mistake".*

Both Giulia and Serena embarked on a STEM degree out of passion and did it despite pressure from those who think a science degree is not 'girly'. They agree that when you are 18 or 19, it is very difficult to make a decision that will mark your career (and your life) without being influenced by the context: family, friends, teachers who consider you "not very good at maths" as happened to Serena.

Giulia had considered enrolling in the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, a discipline that has always fascinated her, *"but I was a bit put off: mechanical and aerospace engineering is a masculine world, and I felt like a fish out of water".* So I decided to go for environmental engineering of the territory: *a field where the presence of women is a bit higher. In the end, however, I am happy with my path, I was very passionate about it".*

For both of them, the choice was dictated solely by their passion for the subject they were studying; there was no prior reflection on possible career opportunities: *"I just thought it might be the right thing for me because of the way I think,"* explains Giulia Marigliano. But the path has not always been easy: *"When we were doing the exercises, I sometimes found that I was not listened to by my classmates, even if I was right. There is always a prejudice on the part of boys that you, as a woman, 'are a bit less',"* says Serena Delli. *"This situation, this fighting every single day also has negative effects on relations between us women: I experience not being 'comrades' with the other few women in my sector as something very bad. But on the other hand I understand it, because I know where this attitude comes from".*

Being a woman and studying in a male environment can be difficult for other reasons as well: *"I saw a lot of people crying during engineering exams",* says Giulia. *"But if you are a girl then you cry because you are weak, because you had a fight with your boyfriend the night before. That was the hardest part for me: the character aspects and the way you deal with situations are seen differently just because you are a woman".*

Chapter 9

Financial Education: the Disadvantage for Girls Must be Overcome



The lack of financial literacy prevents people from making appropriate financial decisions, and leads them to make mistakes in assessment, which can also have long-term consequences. Fortunately, nowadays *financial literacy* is recognised worldwide as a basic skill which, just as reading and numeracy, must be kept up and used throughout one's entire life. Not only to deal with socio-economic and demographic changes (such as the ageing of the population) but also due to the increasing use of digital tools and technologies that enable a growing number of people - especially young people - to access banking and financial services⁶⁷.

Worldwide, only 47% of women versus 55% of men have access to an account at a financial institution. Women are also significantly less likely to obtain credit from formal financial institutions, both in developed and developing countries⁶⁸.

This is also because women start from a serious disadvantage: in all countries that adhere to the OSCE⁶⁹, men have better financial knowledge than their female counterparts. The OECD warns

⁶⁷ PISA 2021 Financial Literacy Analytical and Assessment Framework, April 2019

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/sitedocument/PISA-2021-Financial-Literacy-Framework.pdf>

⁶⁸ GFLEC, Fearless Woman: Financial Literacy and Stock Market Participation, March 2021 <https://gflec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Fearless-Woman-Research-March-2021.pdf>

⁶⁹ 57 countries in Europe, Asia and North America participate in the OECD. The full list can be found here: <https://www.osce.org/it/participating-states>

that gender disparities compound women's difficulties in securing their financial wellbeing (especially as seniors) and in participating with confidence in the management of economic and financial activities⁷⁰. This gap starts at a very young age.

At 15 (the age of the students involved in the PISA-OECD tests, which monitor global literacy levels), many boys and girls are already consumers of financial services and face financial decisions. 73% bought something online (either alone or with a family member) and 39% made a payment using a smartphone in the 12 months prior to the test⁷¹. *"They are likely to face growing complexity and risks in the financial marketplace as they move into adulthood,"* notes the OECD.

The most recent PISA-OECD tests show that the levels of financial literacy of 15 year old boys are two points higher, on average, than those of their female peers. However, the gap grows significantly in certain countries such as Italy (-15 points), Peru (-10), Poland (-7), the United States (-6), Chile and Russia (-5). On the contrary, in countries such as Bulgaria (+19 points), Indonesia (+18), Finlandia and Serbia (+6), girls showed better results than their male peers⁷².

There is an additional factor that stops girls and women from developing financial skills and, thus, managing financial products and instruments: doubts about their financial knowledge and a lack of confidence. For this reason, according to the authors of the *Fearless Woman* study⁷³, *"Financial education programs need to be built in a way that fills the knowledge gap for women while boosting confidence. Women need to be fearless!"*

Gender differences in financial literacy performance (girls - boys)

PISA 2018: Are Students Smart about Money? Survey among 15 years old

	Score dif.
OECD average	-2
Indonesia	18
Estonia	-3
Latvia	4
Spain	1
Canada	-6
Italy	-15
Serbia	6
Poland	-7
Russia	-5
Lithuania	4
Georgia	12
Finland	6
Australia	-2
Chile	-5
Portugal	-1
Brazil	2
United States	-6
Slovak Republic	-1

⁷⁰ OECD/INFE 2020 International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy, 2020

<https://www.oecd.org/financial/education/oecd-infe-2020-international-survey-of-adult-financial-literacy.pdf>

⁷¹ OECD, PISA 2018 Results (Volume IV), Are Students Smart about Money?

2020 <https://www.oecd.org/daf/pisa-2018-results-volume-iv-48ebd1ba-en.htm>

⁷² <https://www.oecd.org/daf/pisa-2018-results-volume-iv-48ebd1ba-en.htm>

⁷³ GFLEC, *Fearless Woman: Financial Literacy and Stock Market Participation*, March 2021 <https://gflec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Fearless-Woman-Research-March-2021.pdf>

Bulgaria	19
Peru	-10

Source: OECD, 2020

Financial literacy leads to independence

There are no doubts about the importance of achieving full economic and financial independence for girls and boys, especially given the acceleration of the digital revolution, which require a significant change on transversal soft skills, with a focus on behavioural and relational skills, which, however, cannot exist without a solid base of hard skills, i.e., technical skills.

And for a country that is in the next to last place among OECD countries in terms of financial literacy levels, there is a tangible concern that girls could be excluded from full active economic citizenship. This concern is supported by the data of the Bank of Italy, which shows that young girls and women over 50 are more exposed to financial fragility which also puts them at risk for fraud or financial abuse.

In the surveys conducted by the Global Thinking Foundation in the second half of 2020 (on a sample of 1,000 women in Italy), 37% of young women from 18-35 years of age had no idea what a revolving credit card is, and 19.7% think that no debit interest is paid on such a card. 47% did not clearly understand the difference in risk between purchasing stocks or bonds, while it was comforting to know that 75.8% knew what supplementary pension funds are. Even though they do not consider this an urgent issue, yet 80% of the interviewees stated that they have money in their bank accounts or “in a safe place” while only 17% feel confident in investing in financial products. Women’s working conditions certainly have a great impact, as they continue to suffer high unemployment and a considerable lack of job security. A survey conducted by the Global Thinking Foundation in the first quarter of 2021 showed that only 50% of unemployed women have chosen not to work, while 25% state that they cannot find work and 22.61% do not work because they are unable to manage work and family.

Now, let’s focus on young people. Students are increasingly interacting with Apps and instruments to digitally manage their savings. Surveying the knowledge of over 800 students of secondary schools who participated in financial education and environmental education courses as apart of the “ImmaginiAMO Sostenibile” (Imagining Sustainability) project showed that all of them had good awareness of the concept of a bank account. However, if we analyse the figure according to gender, we find that only 75% of girls answered correctly, compared to 82% of boys. This figure shows that, unfortunately, the *gender gap* remains among our young people in secondary schools, and stands at around 7 percentage points. This figure is in line with the latest OECD PISA figures from 2018. This gap was also found among lower secondary school pupils, who were asked the same question during our courses. This results in a picture of constant disparities between boys and girls, which rises up to almost 10%, both in terms of knowledge and awareness of how to use money.

It is promising to note that the introduction of a weekly allowance among young people could trigger a virtuous cycle of increasing awareness of the financial aspects of life and shrink the gap to 3%. Nonetheless, we must note that this measure is one applied strictly within the family and it is difficult to intervene in that area.

Other types of considerations arise in analysing the education levels of families. The higher the level of education of families, the higher the basic literacy of children. That's not all: the higher the level of difficulty of the school, the greater the basic knowledge of economic principles which the children master. Thus, it is very clear that quality education forms the foundation of any action aimed at fighting for gender equality.

The data from the Doxa Edufin “Emergenza Covid 19 , gli italiani tra fragilità e resilienza finanziaria” (Covid-19 Emergency: Fragility and Financial Resilience of Italians), which surveyed the economic knowledge of over 5,000 individuals on basic concepts of financial education, also showed that only 16% of young people from 18 to 35 actually understand concepts regarding interest rates and the risk-return ratio. This situation is also caused by the fact that Italians leave their parents' home at a very late age and, thus, effectively join the working world at a later age than the European average.

Lack of knowledge inevitably leads to financial anxiety, which hinders an effective management of one's savings and income from future work that meets with obstacles to the transfer of skills cross the generations within the family, linked to cultural heritage regarding the value of money and its importance as a foundational subject for education regarding one's future life in society.

The lack of adequate financial education prevents people from reaching full financial independence, and places the family in the central place of this significant effort. For this reason, a renewal of programmes in schools would be more than desirable in order to ensure the autonomy of the new generations in making more informed choices.

Valid examples from Canada and France demonstrate that a national strategy fully implemented by the government at all levels of education make sure that young men and women be better prepared for the challenges in the working world and in their futures. Government effort, “ethical” consulting and widespread programmes for the most fragile categories of society are crucial.

For example, the data from the experience of our digital platform FamilyMI are comforting. More than 3,000 new accesses, an increase of 60% on the previous year, with significant interest in the budget calculator, an indispensable tool that can be easily used for informed, responsible management of one's resources.

Lastly, the start of a change can be seen if we once again analyse the data from secondary schools. Concerns about the future are widely shared, by both boys and girls. There is absolute equality between the sexes in the answers regarding future and unplanned expenses, but the girls have understood, more than the boys, that financial literacy is a fundamental tool for their independence. Now that we have this awareness, it remains to take action allowing our young people to access the financial concepts from a very young age, in order that, if we conduct the same surveys a few years from now, the gender gap within children will finally be closed.

Claudia Segre, President, Global Thinking Foundation

Chapter 10

Achieving gender equality to empower girls



"Covid-19 has consumed gender equality"⁷⁴. With this to-the-point phrase, the economist Cristiana Compagno, former Chancellor of the University of Udine from 2008 to 2013, summarised the impact of the pandemic on equality between genders. A comment on the data contained in the most recent edition of the "Global Gender Gap Index"⁷⁵, a voluminous document which provides a snapshot each year of the "gap" between men and women in politics, contribution to the economy, education and access to healthcare, in addition to providing an "overview", which takes into consideration all of these factors combined into one.

If in the "pre Covid-19" world it would have taken 99 years to close the gap, in the "post Covid-19" world we would need 135 years. There are profound differences between geographical locations: in western Europe and North America, following current trends, the gap could be closed in between 52 and 61 years. On the other hand, we have South Asia (195 years), the Middle East and North Africa (142 years) and Eastern-Pacific Asia (165 years).

On a global level, the gap between men and women is particularly wide when it comes to participation in politics: women only represent 26.1% of 35 thousand active parliamentarians over 156 countries. Meanwhile, within executive committees, women represent 22.6% of a total of 3,400 ministers. In 81 countries (including Italy), a woman has never been head of state. Without any significant changes, it will take 145 years to level the playing field in this sector.

⁷⁴ https://www.ansa.it/canale_lifestyle/notizie/societa_diritti/2021/07/02/parita-genere-economista-servono-135-anni-per-recuperarla_cf312d7d-ae60-4d33-b67d-265ac35097a7.html

⁷⁵ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, March 2021

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

Girls in politics, a challenge to overcome

Offering adolescents the opportunity to reflect and take action on active citizenship guarantees freedom of expression and sets them on a journey of growth and empowerment. This is the objective of the Scuola Prime Minister, set up two years ago in Favara, Sicily, which to date has worked with more than 500 teenagers and has opened other schools in Naples, Rome, Rieti, Puglia and Basilicata. “We think that the lack of female participation in civic engagement and politics is deeply unjust, as well as the more general presence of stereotypes that limit the potential and freedom of choice of young women”, explains Denise Di Dio, founder of the initiative alongside Eva Vittoria Cammerino, Angela Laurenza and Florinda Saieva.

As is the case in many other countries, women are under-represented in Italian politics and consequentially their views are under-heard. The idea at the heart of Scuola Prime Minister is that more women are needed to bridge the gender gap. *“This is a medium to long term investment to increase the number of women who are ready and able to intervene in public matters, through civic associations, political parties or their chosen profession”*, Denise Di Dio explains. *“At the same time, it is a far more immediate investment to immediately change the way in which young women perceive themselves, their potential, the stereotypes that they have to overcome in order to make decisions about their future, and the role that they can have in their community, starting from schools and the neighbourhoods they live in”*.

Mariachiara Galante, 18 years of age, who is enrolled on the course at Scuola Prime Minister, says she would like to become a strong woman, a successful woman, a woman who is proud of herself and who is well rounded. A woman who doesn't let anyone walk over her. *“Since I was young I have noticed the differences in behaviours between us girls and boys. Certain behaviours and things that weren't right, which my female classmates instead hadn't ever noticed. I want to make a change towards gender equality, and I want to do it where I live, here in Basilicata, but I hope that my contribution can make a change on a regional or national level”*.

In a period in history where young people talk a lot about these matters, but in reality take little action, Scuola Prime Minister decided to work with young people from 14 to 19 years of age. An age which is “very delicate, but formative at the same time”, Di Dio comments: an age where young people question their own personality and values, thinking about the role they would like to have in their adult life. Years in which they form the foundation for their future (also in a professional sense). *“This is the moment in which young women have the greatest need to get to know themselves, to learn to trust themselves, to count on programmes and above-all a community of people who invest and believe in them”*, Di Dio adds.

And then there's the question of politics. *“We are finding out that young people don't participate in politics because it isn't spoken about enough: at school it's considered a taboo, in the media it is spoken about badly, only with references to individuals and never to ideas, and even less about involvement on a local level”*, she explains. Paola Pietrosanti, 19 years old from Rome, instead “discovered” politics when she was six years old: when she asked her parents what the electoral campaign was, that she had heard about on the television. *“They told me that it is the job of the Prime Minister to serve the nation. They told me that it was a wonderful thing and that everyone should be able to do it”*. From that moment, Paola began to dream of a future career in politics: *“I was the student representative at my secondary school. I came to understand that when you organise activities, what you do isn't just for you, it's for the community: the challenge is doing things for the good of others while sticking to your personal principles”*.

Not all the female students who join the Scuola Prime Minister have the same clear ideas, many are motivated by their curiosity to try something new. *“Right from the first lesson even those who don't already have a clear objective start to ask themselves how they can contribute to changing things that aren't right, from climate change to discrimination of any kind. All of them want to have an impact on their community and society in a wider sense, looking out for people, changing things, making things right”*.

This for us is the essence of politics and we are happy to accompany them on their endeavours in activism”, Denise Di Dio concluded.

Generation Changemakers

Young people today are the protagonists in many of defining topics of our time. We are assisting with the diffusion and strengthening of important youth movements, capable of guiding public discussion and directing it towards decisions and actions that aim to reaffirm human rights, promoting inclusivity and integration, and protecting the environment.

Young people today are agents and protagonists for change, as with their energy, vision and skills they are able to have an impact and implement positive changes within their communities. They are establishing themselves as true changemakers. In this regard, it should be noted that the Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani (Italian National Youth Agency), in collaboration with Ashoka Italia, has recently launched “GEN C – Generation Changemakers”, an initiative aimed at laying out all good practices put into place by young people, in order to construct a large community of young men and women who are committed to change.

In this climate, the role that new generations can have in protecting gender equality is taking centre stage, favouring active participation from girls of all ages and guiding a collective path against inequality and gender stereotypes.

Even today, despite gender being an everyday topic, in some contexts discriminative situations persist, where young girls and women are unable to freely choose their path in life, follow their ambitions and develop their own passions.

The Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani has been concentrating on this topic for years, prioritising and deeming necessary the education of new generations, and the implementation of preventative measures. Enabling and educating young people on gender equality is fundamental in order for them to be conscious and aware, and to actively involve them in action against inequality and the implementation of inclusive policies and experiences. The active participation of young men and women and their involvement at a decisional level is an essential step towards the construction of an inclusive and open society, where girls and women have a place, a voice and are given opportunities; where they have access to information, are encouraged and inspired by positive role models, where they are free to pursue a career in scientific and mathematical fields and fill senior positions.

Implementation of preventative measures, education, participation and the involvement of more young people are the central themes of the programmes that the Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani promotes. In the projects put in place, young men and women constantly experience inclusion, integration and collaboration among their peers, contributing to breaking down gender differences and putting in place experiences that favour and guarantee female empowerment, the involvement of women, the fight against stereotypes, discrimination and gender-based violence. Starting with language.

Apart from being involved in European programmes, the Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani concerns itself with gender, actively participating with #IoGiocoAllaPari (#LevellingThePlayingField), a ‘Training Ground’ on rights and skills, promoted by Terre des Hommes Italia and Junior Achievement Italia. Thanks to this initiative, the Agency has worked with more than 25 thousand young people in their second year of secondary school, on a training programme covering themes related to generational empowerment and gender equality.

This is a highly innovative course which initiates a discussion about positive role-models and promotes awareness on certain subjects and on how to acquire certain skills for the young people

involved. An open and inclusive society, in which the rights of men and women alike are guaranteed, starting with giving a voice to young people, valuing and defending positive examples, role models and good practices.

Lucia Abbinante, Director, Agenzia Nazionale Giovani

GEN E: inspiring young people through business studies

The regression of progress made in the educational sector due to school closures because of the pandemic also concerns the diffusion of business studies and the benefits thereof in the national secondary school system.

When business studies are introduced to schools, barriers are broken. Teaching becomes innovative - teachers are asked to abandon traditional teaching methods and engage more with students, improving their performance and the education system as a whole. A survey carried out on a sample of students who participated in business experience activities in June 2020, during the first phase of the pandemic, revealed that taking a course which was followed in a hybrid format, with a higher amount of digital content, was considered to be a great opportunity by 98%. 75% successfully completed the educational programme and 60% would like to integrate it into traditional education.

For Junior Achievement Italia, promoting business studies at school means involving the younger generations, in particular teenagers, making them the focus when it comes to building a collective future. If entrepreneurship is *“working with opportunities and ideas to transform them into a financial, societal or cultural gain for others”*⁷⁶, business studies encompasses learning through experience, orientation and building awareness, which encourages creativity, innovation and personal growth, as well as growth in a business context.

In the world, there are around 2 billion young people who were born between 1995 and 2009, i.e. 30% of the world population⁷⁷. This means that generation z is the largest generational group, all with similar characteristics on a global level in terms of professional flexibility, digital skills and level of education. Over recent years, the most frequently requested soft skills by employers according to the World Economic Forum continue to be critical thinking and analysis, as well as problem solving and the ability to work independently in terms of active learning, creativity and resilience, tolerance to stress and flexibility.

As seen in various studies by Junior Achievement, both in Italy, in particular with the Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis, as well as internationally (such as the Innovation Cluster for Entrepreneurship Education (ICEE) project), entrepreneurial skills increase the performance of students in terms of problem solving, teamwork, understanding of the economy, finance and business management, as well as self-esteem and organisation and planning skills. Likewise, still referring to the data, from the mini studies by Junior Achievement it was seen that the preferred work sectors for students are social media, at 20%, and environmental work, at 30%. A significant piece of information that refers to the effort that must be made over the following years to implement an ecological shift that is in every part necessary as it is requested.

In this current period of time, post-healthcare emergency and in a production crisis, bringing business studies back to the centre of the educational system would mean creating a strong correlation between education, training and socio-economic development, but it would also mean

⁷⁶ EntreComp, 2016.

⁷⁷ study by the Australian organisation, McCrindle.

ensuring that employers, and in different ways their employees, are involved in not only national but also local education systems. Only an extended and attentive engagement with local ecosystems can recreate or relaunch all of the opportunities relating to experience and orientation that young people should enjoy, in order to approach with greater awareness the world of work but also the world of self-employment or start-ups. The speed in which worldwide economic systems react and recover post-pandemic will also depend on the capacity of governments and society to involve the younger generations in relative programmes, and to integrate the 'E factor' into the educational system, i.e. "*education, entrepreneurship, employment and environment*".

Miriam Cresta, CEO, Junior Achievement Italia

A summit for girls

Last July, the W20 Summit⁷⁸ took place in Rome - 3 days dedicated to female empowerment organised by Women20 (W20), the official gender equality engagement group of G20, established in 2015 by the Turkish Presidency.

The initiative also had the role of delivering the recommendations from W20 to governments in order to advance the overcoming of the gender gap. Specifically, the Italian Presidency chose to focus on 5 key areas, namely: women in the workplace, entrepreneurship and finance, the digital gender gap, and for the first time in history prioritised the topics of violence against women and girls and the liaison between gender and the environment.

Alongside these 5 topics, discussions were had with regard to gender in medicine and cultural change, and the organisation set up two special committees concerning these topics.

The topic of overcoming stereotypes also though the creation of role models for young girls is one of the key points for the W20 presidency. Right from the very first years of school, it is fundamental to dispel prejudices that create a division between male and female professions. In this sense, it is of crucial importance to provide examples of different women in all types of professions, but above all in professions that are predominantly participated in by men.

Another complementary activity is providing tools and information to families and teachers, who play an essential role in the creation of a diverse and inclusive culture.

During the summit, with the collaboration of organisations such as Unicef, Save the Children and Terre des Hommes, a W20 for girls was also held - a moment of reflection on the challenges and steps to be undertaken in order to safeguard the rights of girls all over the world, ensuring they are free from discrimination and prejudice.

Martina Rogato, W20 Sherpa

An international consortium for girls' leadership

Terre des Hommes is part of the She Leads consortium that aims to increase the influence of girls and young women on decision-making processes concerning the creation and enhancement of positive gender norms in the political, civic and social spheres.

In a strategic partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the She Leads consortium brings together child rights organisations, feminist/women's rights organisations, and GYW-led groups and aims to increase sustained influence of girls and young women (GYW) on decision-making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions.

⁷⁸ https://w20italia.it/w20_summit/

Central is the collective action of civil society, and in particular of girls and young women who work to achieve gender equality and to receive a space for participation in public decision-making processes.

In recent years, we have seen, globally, a growing activism led by girls and young people who challenge exclusion and injustice and who claim their right to participate in political decisions that affect them. She Leads wants to support - locally, nationally, regionally and internationally - the advocacy work of these young women, accompanying them in their demands for greater participation in political decisions and in their path of empowerment as agents of change. For example, in Uganda, She Leads offers technical and training support to girls who want to participate in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is a special procedure within the United Nations to improve the human rights situation around the world. In this way, the lobbying and advocacy work of the girls supported by She Leads will bring high in the political agenda of diplomats and officials certain issues - including gender inequality, exclusion from decision-making and negative social norms – which are essential for the design and application of laws that respect the rights of girls.

Laura Chello, She Leads Officer, Terre des Hommes International Federation

Chapter 11

Girls on the front line for the defence of the environment



Women, girls and children are paying the highest price for the consequences of climate changes, starting from economic disadvantage and high vulnerability.

Droughts, monsoons, hurricanes and extreme climate events force rural families to abandon their villages, accentuating poverty in already impoverished areas and increasing, for the younger girls, the risk of child marriage or of becoming victims of trafficking. The impact of climate changes, in fact, have direct repercussions on access to education for children and girls and all its consequences. The Malala Foundation estimates⁷⁹ that just in 2021 the consequences of extreme climate events will prevent at least four million girls in low and lower-middle income countries from completing their education. And if urgent measures against global warming are not taken before 2050, climate changes will be a factor that will contribute preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing school every year.

Taking action to oppose global warming - even through the active involvement of the youngest, in all countries of the world - represents a step that can no longer be delayed in order to guarantee respect of the fundamental human rights to those who have contributed less in causing this dramatic situation but who risk paying the highest price.

Fridays for Future (FFF) - launched by the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg in 2018 - is one of the many movements born in recent years that sees the front line participation of hundreds of thousands of girls in demanding urgent climate policies and a fast transition towards a decarbonised society. These are the stories of some of them.

79 <https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-publishes-report-on-climate-change-and-girls-education>

In conversation with the German politician: Luisa Neubauer

Like many girls and boys who, in recent years, are animating environmental movements, Luisa Neubauer (class of 1996) had never planned to become a climate activist. She was 13 the first time that she heard of the greenhouse effect: *"I remember finding it quite irritating that something so fundamental was restricted into a single geography lesson"*, she explained. A little of that irritation must have remained as Luisa decided to study geography at university and, for the first time, was able to study and observe the data and numbers of the climate emergency. *"I had no idea that we are rushing into this self-made disaster in such a rapid pace"*, she explained during a TED Talk⁸⁰. This brings us to 2015, the year of the Paris Agreement. However, Luisa's hopes of witnessing real change fade within a few months: in relation to science warnings, politics continues doing nothing. The commitments made were not translating into concrete actions and, at the same time, the effects of climate changes were increasingly evident. Luisa therefore decides to roll up her sleeves and, starting from 2016, participates in various climate initiatives. Thanks to the campaigns organised by the *Fossil Free Göttingen* group of which Luisa Neubauer was the spokesperson, the historic university of the German city decides to withdraw all of its investments in the fossil fuel sector.

Between 2018 and 2019, when the wave of protest which will lead to the first worldwide school strike for climate was gaining momentum (15 March 2019), Luisa Neubauer is in the front line and in Germany becomes the best known face of the movement founded by Greta Thunberg. She does not think that the strikes can directly influence politics: what is truly important - she explains - is all the work that lies behind the organisation of the strikes.

Today she is a full-time activist and co-ordinates the Fridays for Future movement in Germany, where the local FFF groups number between 200 and 500, each of which organises protests and actions on its own area. *"We are a power in the German political spectrum, we meet ministers practically every week"*, says Neubauer in an interview with SkyTg24⁸¹.

Move forward despite the threats: Anuna De Wever

Although she is only 20 years old, the Belgian Anuna De Wever is already one of the most important figures between the climate strike promoters and organisers in her country. *"I have read a lot about climate change over the past years: it's fucking scary! A lot people do not understand the urgency of action. We are, literally, at the last minute of being able to do something"*, she tells to author of a documentary⁸² dedicated to young climate activists.

Anuna began her activism in the city of Mortsels, where she grew up, before moving to Brussels, capital of the country and home of the European institutions, with the knowledge that she could have a greater impact: *"I started my climate activism very locally, trying to change Belgian climate policy. But soon I realised that our political system was unable to act."* Anuna describes Belgian politicians as *"quite incapable and very ignorant when it comes to climate change"*. For that reason she decided to take action to put pressure at the European and international levels. *"Anyone who is aware of the urgency of the situation could not be optimistic. We're racing towards heatwaves, droughts, famine,*

80 https://www.ted.com/talks/luisa_neubauer_why_you_should_be_a_climate_activist?language=it

81 <https://tg24.sky.it/ambiente/2021/04/21/luisa-neubauer-fridays-for-future-germania-intervista>

82 The New resistance, Vice, 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANlkg7pOicE&list=PLaXYmy6yM19O2XRwR02mQ8KGPvJ1rg9EE&ab_channel=VICELife

millions of climate refugees, inhabitable countries... and nobody realises", she said in an interview with Euronews⁸³.

Anuna De Wever is not an optimist. However, she does not think all is already lost. Because if so, she would not fight so hard to achieve a change on a global scale. *"I do have hope. I do believe that we can still turn the tables. We just have very little time to do this. And that's why we need everyone to rebel and step up, to literally fight for our future"*.

As happened to Greta Thunberg, also Anuna had to deal with insults, online hate campaigns, death and rape threats: *"It can be hard"*, noted the young woman in an interview with Vogue. Anuna de Wever suffered a particularly vicious attack in 2019 at the Pukkelpop music festival, when her speech was aggressively whistled by extreme-right activists who then chased the girl backstage, shouting death threats and forcing security to intervene. *"I clearly heard them yelling 'Where's Anuna? We're going to kill her. We know she's here!'. As an 18-year-old, it's not easy. But at the end, it's not affecting what we do. I will never stop doing what I do, Greta will never stop doing what she does. No activists will do it, because we know that what we're doing is way more important than those hate comments"*.

Disha Ravi, arrested for her activism.

In February 2021, tens of thousands of farmers marched on Delhi to protest against laws liberalising the agricultural sector proposed by the government of Narendra Modi. On 4th February, Greta Thunberg published a tweet through which she shared a "toolkit": a simple text file with the information needed to organise online and street protests, the hashtags to use to express support for the farmers fighting for their survival. The document was modified and relaunched by Disha Ravi, 22 years old, one of the founders of the Fridays for Future movement in India. On 13th February, the young woman was picked up from her home in Bangalore by the Delhi police and held in custody for five days under accusations of sedition and criminal conspiracy. Accusations that held only for a few days: on 23rd February, the judge who examined her case declared the accusations against her "scanty and sketchy". All while, on social media and TV, the accusations against her continued: terrorist and traitor.

In a rare interview given at the start of July to the *Times of India* newspaper, Disha Ravi talked⁸⁴ about how after her arrest and release she had spent a lot of time reading and informing herself ("About history, land rights, and other environmental topics"), and now she writes as a freelance journalist to support herself and is working on an FFF campaign to stop the felling of over 6,000 trees near Bangalore.

Disha Ravi is a young woman who has been directly affected by the impact of climate changes, both through herself and her family. Her grandparents, who are farmers, were in endless fights over water access for irrigation of their fields. As a child, Disha's mother had to go on foot to fetch water every day before going to school. Disha herself has twice witnessed her house being flooded by monsoons. *"It was only after I turned 18 and had access to the internet that I was able to read more, and connected all this to the climate crisis"*, she explained to the Times of India. *"In Bangalore, I live far away from the city in an area with a badly managed drainage system: it's a village and*

83 <https://www.euronews.com/green/2020/10/19/anuna-de-wever-on-fighting-climate-change-and-incapable-politicians>

84 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/i-am-always-going-to-speak-up-even-if-i-feel-terrified-inside-disha-ravi/articleshow/84300413.cms>

no rich lives here. And no one cares. It made me realise how each community is impacted in different way by the climate crisis”.

Despite what she suffered, Disha will not stop speaking and taking action for what she believes to be right. *“Not speaking up is a privilege that I can’t afford. This fight isn’t mine alone, so even if I was stopped in fighting for climate justice, I know it’s not going to stop the others. There’s no prison or cage big enough for ideas to stay trapped in”.*

Autumn Peltier, the water defender

Despite being one of the most freshwater-rich countries in the world, even today Canada cannot guarantee access to clean water to its indigenous communities (the so-called “First Nations”). Due to laws dating back to the colonial era, indigenous communities have been blocked from managing their own water treatment systems. And still today the federal government does not guarantee access to drinking water to many indigenous communities, and the available one often becomes contaminated by bacteria or heavy metals. Although progress has been made in recent years, there are still 41 communities that cannot safely drink the water that flows from their taps and are forced to boil it before using it.

“I have met children who were born and raised in a world where water is just from a bottle. Last summer I visited a community in the north of Canada and a child told me that his grandparents, both in their seventies, have to walk for two kilometres each day to reach the communal well”. Autumn Peltier is only 17 years old, but has already held the position for two years of “chief water protector” for the Anishnabek Nation, the political organisation which represents the indigenous communities of the Canadian province of Ontario.

“Water is a fundamental human right, everyone has the right of access to drinking water regardless of race, the colour of their skin, or of being rich or poor”, Autumn Peltier declared in an interview. The young indigenous activist started to develop her awareness at just eight years old, when she asked her mother to explain what the “Not drinking water” signs put up in the toilets of an indigenous community meant. From that moment she began to develop an awareness that has led her to endeavour more and more for the protection of the environment and in particular for the defence of water resources. Autumn was also influenced by her great-aunt Josephine Mandamin, a water activist, from whom she has inherited not only a fighting spirit, but also an awareness of water being something sacred, endowed with a spirit.

The face of Autumn Peltier became known across the world in 2016 when, at the early age of 12, she met the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau. She was supposed to give him a gift at the Assembly of the First Nations, but during the ceremony Autumn broke the protocol and spoke to Trudeau, saying: *“I am very unhappy with the choices you've made and that you have not kept the promises that you made to my people”,* before beginning to cry.

In 2018, during celebrations for World Water Day, Autumn was invited to speak to the General Assembly of the United Nations, where she firmly and clearly urged those present: *“It is time to “fight”, to stop polluting the planet and to give water the same rights and protections that we give to human beings. No child should grow up without knowing what clean water is or never know what running water is. We all have a right to this water as we need it — not just rich people, all people”*⁸⁵.

Three years have passed, and today Autumn Peltier is no longer a girl but a young woman even more aware of the importance of the battle she is fighting. In the meantime, the Canadian

government has made changes to water rights in favour of many indigenous communities, but in December 2020 declared that its objective to eliminate the problem of contaminated water before March 2021 would not be achieved. Autumn Peltier and the Canadian First Nations' fight continues.

Towards safer and more inclusive sport, even for girls

The Italian boys and girls love sports: almost eight out of ten play sport at least once a week. However, they are aware that it is often not as inclusive as it appears or as is often claimed. Rather, playgrounds and gyms sometimes witness discrimination and abuse.

The Permanent Observatory on Sport and New Generations⁸⁶ of Terre des Hommes and OneDay Group questioned one thousand very young persons (boys and girls between 13 and 23 years old) from all over Italy to take a snapshot of the sports practice of our country as seen from the eyes of the "Generation Z". It is a perspective that offers a disconcerting insight when it comes to gender inequality. Among the youngest, in fact, there is a strong perception of the disparities between the sexes: in fact, 98% believe that women are unfairly paid less in sport and have less chance of turning professional. 84% think that mixed teams promote gender equality and 68% would like to practice and/or follow more sports with mixed teams. 85% of the interviewees think it is unfair that some sports are considered "male" or "female".

Unfortunately, however, there is also the flip side of the coin: the interviewees think that episodes of racism (44%), bullying (42%), physical and verbal violence (46% and 72%, respectively) happen too often in and outside of competitive sports. There are also exclusions related to gender (54%) or disability (21%). Finally, about a third of the boys and girls say they have experienced inappropriate behaviours from adults and 45% from peers. Though lower - yet still alarming - is the percentage of those who claim that they have suffered from inappropriate sexual behaviours from adults (7%) or peers (9%).

How to change this situation? The boys and girls of "Generation Z" want to be protagonists of a positive change: 60% would like to help write a regulation shared by athletes, families and sports clubs to make sports fairer, more inclusive and safer.

86 <https://terredeshommes.it/comunicati/osservatorio-permanente-sullo-sport-le-nuove-generazioni-by-oneday-terre-des-hommes/>

Terre des Hommes in recent years has also been engaged in this field, putting in place a series of tools and proposals that move toward bringing the rights of children and adolescents and respect between genders back to the centre of sporting activity.

At the international level, on initiative of Terre des Hommes Lausanne, we have helped to build new guidelines for the protection of minors of UEFA, a policy kit, codes of conduct, self-assessment questionnaire, practical suggestions, procedures and modules of in-person and online training that are inspired from the philosophy that we share with highest governing body of European football: a vision that football should be a safe environment, positive and pleasant for everyone, regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity and social background, religion, level of skill and involvement in the game. This applies especially when it comes to children.

In the spirit of long term vision and innovation, a rich set of tools have been made by the Youth and School Sector of the Italian Football Federation, with which Terre des Hommes has just signed a memorandum of understanding that brings us to collaborate in coming years on the front of the protection of minors and, as is central to the approach of campagna Indifesa, on the front of promotion of gender equality.

Training and orientation

Following up on this experience and in the confine of what is defined in the memorandum of understanding with SGS-FIGC, Terre des Hommes Italy, together with a team of specialised psychologists and jurists, has defined a series of training proposals aiming, in conjunction with the Sports Federations and local associations in the implementation of their policies and guidelines, to address a series of specific issues. These include the needs of children and adolescents and the identification of signs of distress; the management of the peer group and the activation of its resources with a view to preventing inappropriate behaviours (bullying, cyberbullying, racism, use of alcohol and drugs, discrimination based on gender, etc.); the use of electronic devices in the changing rooms and related risks; gender equality and the prevention of gender based discrimination; and the ever so delicate management of abuse reporting.

Promotion of gender equality

Together with CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee) and the Athletics, Swimming, Basketball, Soccer, Boxing and Rugby federations, we have built an alliance which, on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child the 11th of October, will enable us to make room for the rights of every girl to play sport as equals of their male peers. With the Italian Rugby Federation (FIR) this community of purpose has also been transformed into a memorandum of understanding which, in addition to the awareness-raising activities under the umbrella of the hashtags #ioGiocoAllaPari and #Indifesa, will also revolve round the axis of a series of training meetings on the issues of respect, gender inclusion and the breaking down of stereotypes that are still very strong in the world of sport.

Still too much impunity

In Italy there are 4.7 million athletes registered with national sports federations. Women are 28.2% of the total, while the *under 18s* are close to 60%. Despite these data, there is no rule, code, article, not even a paragraph dedicated to the issue of sexual violence and abuse, denounced Daniela Simonetti, sports journalist and the author of "Herd impunity. Sex, lies and silence in the world of sport" (Chiarelettere, 2021), the first book-investigation looking into abuses and violence in sport.

"on the contrary, it is not a book against sports. My hope is that this investigation will get us to reflect on the real risks that children are exposed to while practicing sports and bring the federations to take necessary measures", explained Simonetti. "It is time to say enough to the excuses of 'a few bad apples': the phenomenon of abuses and sexual violence to the detriment of young sportsmen, particularly the girl children, does exist".

In many cases, these abuses take place within an alleged romantic relationship but are based on a disequilibrium of power between the coach and the pupil. They are generally normalised in all too many sport environments where every accusation is contested in the name of an alleged "consent" from the girl. "The law, on the other hand," Simonetti explained, "is very clear, *"the Criminal Code establishes that the consent of the minor is always null up to the age of 14 and up to 16 if the sexual act is performed by a figure of guarantee to whom the minor is entrusted for reasons of custody, education and care, as in the case of instructors and coaches. If this figure of guarantee abuses the power granted to him by his role, the consent is considered null up to the age of 18"*.

In other words, sexual acts between a trainer and his underage athletes always constitute a crime, even when masqueraded as a romantic relationship. This type of relationship should be discouraged even if the pupil is of age for the sake of avoiding gossip, imbalance, injustice, suspicion. If the trainer is truly in love with his pupil, he can entrust her to a colleague so as to have a love life without restraint. *"Many teenagers have paid a very high price", Simonetti added, "finding themselves unwittingly in an abusive relationship with a person who wields great power and often uses their dream of winning victories and awards in sports as a leverage. It is difficult for the minor to say no and even more difficult to report due to a deep and misunderstood sense of guilt. It is time to put an end to these situations"*, underlined Simonetti who, in 2017, founded "ChangeTheGame"⁸⁷, the first association in Italy for the fight against sexual violence and abuse of women and minors in sport.

The violence and abuses are compounded by the deficiencies of the sports system which, due to the way it is constructed, is unable to provide an effective response. The victims almost never obtain justice in the sports environment due to outdated rules and norms that are never adjusted to the progress made in the criminal sector in the field of harassment and abuse, nor are they adapted to a new awareness regarding the protection of women and minors. Basically: without a criminal conviction it can happen that the sports justice system jams and nothing happens for many years. And even when "exemplary" sentences such as expulsion are issued, the offender can re-register: *"We have made a proposal to change the sporting regulations that prohibits those expelled for abuse and violence against minors from registering in other disciplines: it is a simple reform that could be done in a few days, but so far people do not want to change anything"*, explained the journalist. Conviction is obviously not enough: *"We must prevent abuses, precise policies and regulations that sanction inappropriate behaviours are needed. In addition, coaches, managers, volunteers and staff should be asked to provide criminal certificates upon hiring and when renewing the annual membership"*.

Harassment even in eSports

The cessation of sports activities during the months of the Covid-19 epidemic combined with long months of limited social life for millions of children and young people round the world have increased the number of players and spectators of the so-called "eSports", or professional level competitions in video games with national and world championships. And there is every type of game: from strategic ones to the so-called "shoot'em all", from football simulations to basketball and even Tetris⁸⁸. ESport is a rapidly growing sector and it is estimated that in 2020 it reached a global audience of 495 million spectators.

On paper, in this championship girls and boys can compete on equal terms. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case. Evil Geniuses (one of the main organisers of eSport championships) conducted a survey in which almost one in two girls (44%) playing eSports claimed to have suffered gender discrimination in 2020. About a quarter of the girls interviewed said they regularly modified their actions to disguise their identity, changing their profiles and game characters to appear more neutral or masculine. Or just forgo verbal conversation.⁸⁹

A 2019 study of eSports "athletes" over 16 years of age found that one in three girls has suffered abuse or discrimination including sexual harassment, threats of rape, exclusions from competitions for being women, being sent inappropriate messages and contents (including on other platforms) and insults while playing⁹⁰.

Does the media ignore women's sports?

But sport is not only what one practices, but also what one relates. For this reason, the European Agenda for Gender Equality in Sport sets among its objectives the creation of an equal and correct media narrative, which gives a worthy and fair representation of both sexes in order to build a cultural imaginary and a more egalitarian, less stereotyped collective vision.

But how far has the Italian media come toward a correct and fair representation of women's sport? Nicolò Grandieri, who graduated in Communication Design at the Milan Polytechnic, tried to answer this question. In his dissertation *Let's raise our voice and change the rules! Gender discrimination in Italian sports coverage*⁹¹, he analysed over three thousand articles from the three main Italian sports newspapers (*Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport*, *Tuttosport*) and their respective websites for two weeks (9-15 July and 14-20 September 2020) to monitor the number of articles dedicated to women's sport. The result: 29 articles during the first week taken into consideration (equal to 1.8% of the total), 51 in the second (3%) while the Tour de France and the Giro Rosa were underway. In seven out of forty two paper editions, there was not even one piece of news dedicated to women's sport.

Regarding the analysis of the websites of the three newspapers, "one perceives that some contents (dedicated to the female athletes, and also to the companions/wives of the male athletes Ed.) were placed there not to inform but for embellishment, and above all to satisfy the tastes of the public", wrote Grandieri. "The feeling is that these sites try to satisfy the most intimate needs of the public by

88 <https://esports.gazzetta.it/news/21-03-2018/arrivano-gli-esport-il-futuro-degli-sport-e-gia-presente-41881>

89 https://assets.evilgeniuses.gg/dei/EG_YouGov_GamingForAll.pdf

90 Centre for Sport and Human Rights, *An Overview of the Sport-Related Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children*, 2020 https://www.sporhumanrights.org/media/gonjwdlo/an_overview_of_the_sport-related_impacts_of_the_covid-19_pandemic_on_children.pdf

91 <https://terredeshommes.it/news/alziamo-la-voce-cambiamo-le-regole/>

offering them NON-NEWS, helping to spread an antiquated and stereotyped model of a man who is passionate about sports and a lover of beautiful women".

The lack of parity is not accidental, but it is a choice. Just as it is a choice to centre the coverage of women's sport on the basis of linguistic and visual stereotypes. The choice of ignoring women's sports.

Inspirational female footballers

The Women's Football Division organizing the Serie A and Serie B championships within the Federation makes it natural for the interaction and comparison with colleagues from the School Youth Sector and Club Italia, our national teams.

I knew this all along that the young girls like playing football. Therefore it is evident that the comprehensive promotion of our sport be of fundamental importance in order that football become increasingly more accessible at the local level.

The health emergency has unfortunately stopped team sports in schools and we will therefore have to wait until the end of this season to find out the impact on membership numbers, but during the long period of virtual meetings organised by the School Youth Sector, the small girls have been very receptive, thanks also to their new idols, the girls of our national team. There are many training and promotion programs proposed, including Playmakers, the UEFA-Disney project launched in June in Italy to involve the age bracket between 5 and 8 in a recreational/educational way. The common goal is to double the number of registered girls by 2025, following our mission to open up the world of women's football across the country, breaking down all cultural barriers. In this important year of transition, the FIGC signed the first Convention in May with the Department for Sport of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the allocation of funds aimed at supporting interventions for the transition to professionalism and the extension of protection at work in women's sports. The change in the status of the female athletes in Serie A from the 2022/23 season will guarantee the players sufficient health care, social security contributions, with a regulatory and financial impact on the clubs that will largely finance this innovation. The economic impact of professionalism on a movement still under development, in addition to having to provide for a structured revenue system, will have to focus on avoiding the dispersion of assets invested in the various youth sectors since 2015.

To prepare for this monumental change, the Division's Board of Directors has proposed new formats for the national championships of Serie A, Serie B and Serie C as approved by the Federal Council on June 9. All these are thanks to the contribution of the various internal working groups that directly involve the Serie A and Serie B clubs and the collaboration with the National Amateur League. These changes were deemed necessary for the sustainability of our entire system which imposes on us a higher level of competitiveness, thereby guaranteeing a more attractive spectacle.

The uncoded broadcast of one match per week on a national network was evaluated as a strategic communication method to reach more and more Italian families. The girls will thus be able to discover all the protagonists of the top league, who will be an inspiration for their personal growth through our values: passion, determination and elegance. Through football we are committed to supporting women's empowerment, the greatest opportunity to expand our sport. New professional figures, such as the General Manager and the Goalkeeper Athletic Trainer, as

required for the admission into our top championships, also open up new job opportunities for the post sports career for the female athletes.

Ludovica Mantovani, president of the FIGC Women's Football Division

Chapter 13

Girls on social media, caution is a must



The emergency of Covid-19 has forced millions of people to move a large part of their life online for weeks, if not months: work, school, opportunities to meet friends. For children and young people deprived of the opportunity to go to school, to play sports, to spend their free time in the company of their peers. Smartphones and tablets have become the only window into the world. A study ⁹² conducted by the World Wide Web Foundation and the World Association of Girls and Scout Guides on a sample of over 8,000 boys and girls from 180 countries found that 52% of teenagers and young women have been abused online, including being sent threatening messages, cyberbullying, sexual harassment and sharing private images without consent. And 87% of girls think the situation is getting worse. *“What worries the young women who took part in the survey are mainly the sharing of personal photos and videos, followed by sexual harassment. In both cases, young women are more concerned about these issues than their male peers,” according to the research.* These behaviours are not limited to the virtual sphere, but have (often dramatic) consequences in real life: among the girls who participated in the survey and who were abused online, more than half said that this experience compromised their emotional and physical well-being. While a further 31% stated that these experiences had an impact on their trust in the use of the Internet.

A similar survey conducted in 31 countries on a sample of 14,000 girls brings similar conclusions: more than half interviewed say they have been subjected to harassment and abuses online. A situation that begins as early as the age of 8, while most girls are harassed for the first time

92 <https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/>

between the ages of 14 and 16. *“Activists (including girls and young women, LGBTQ + activists) are often targeted with particular nastiness. Their lives and their families are being threatened. Girls are silenced by a toxic level of harassment ”.*

The Indifesa observatory on cyberbullying

A similar situation was captured by the Terre des Hommes and ScuolaZoo Indifesa Observatories⁹³ which in 2020 carried out a survey of over 6,000 boys and girls from all over Italy, aged between 13 and 23. The results are concerning: 6 out of 10 say they don't feel safe online. 68% of them claim to have witnessed episodes of bullying, or cyberbullying, while 61% have been victims. It is girls who are most afraid, especially on social media and dating apps: 61.36% of them confirms this. After cyberbullying, the biggest nightmare for girls is *Revenge Porn* (52.16%) along with the risk of online harassment (51.24%) enticement by the ill-intentioned (49.03%) and loss of their privacy (44.73%). In addition, 44.57% of girls report feeling severe discomfort from receiving unwelcome comments of sexual nature online. Finally, on the other side of the coin, there are 8% of girls who admit to having committed bullying, or cyberbullying, a percentage that rises to 14.76% among boys.

The concern about the dissemination of "intimate" photographic images and videos is increasingly widespread among very young girls, also because even before Covid sending one's sexual images had become common for almost 10% of the age bracket from 14 to 19 years old, according to a 2018 study by the National Adolescent Observatory.⁹⁴

The fear expressed by the girls who participated in the survey is amply justified, as Guido Scorza, member of the Garante for the protection of personal data, explained in an interview⁹⁵: "Once an image or a video is put on a digital platform and you lose control of it for some reason, there is unfortunately no rule, no law, and no Authority in the world that can guarantee that the video can be brought back into the intimate and private sphere for which it was intended ", he explains. Compared to a few years ago, much has been done. From a regulatory point of view, in 2019 "Revenge Porn" has become a crime and many of the platforms normally used for the diffusion of this kind of content allow us to identify this type of content and to remove it. In some cases, like Facebook and Instagram, they manage to prevent it from being re-published. *"Basically - concludes Scorza - you can certainly do a lot to limit the circulation of Revenge Porn content but you cannot, in an honest way, guarantee anyone that even if you report and intervene promptly, you can completely block or remove that content everywhere and make sure it never gets published again, we are probably not there yet ”.*

When a filter can undermine self-esteem

Continuous exposure to the online world can have consequences, much more difficult to perceive, but potentially equally negative, for the psychological development of little girls and young women.

A threat comes from the so-called "beauty filters" and photo editing software, which are taking on a new (and increasingly important) role in the lives of girls and young women. Extremely simple tools to use, which in a few minutes allow you to even out the skin tone, erase spots and

93 <https://terredeshommes.it/comunicati/bullismo-cyberbullismo-parlano-ragazzi-dati-dellosservatorio-indifesa/>

94 <https://www.skuola.net/news/inchiesta/quattordicenne-violentata-ricattata.html>

95 <https://www.garanteprivacy.it/home/docweb/-/docweb-display/docweb/9561855>

imperfections, and make the eyes bigger and brighter. Increasingly widespread and seemingly harmless, these tools are having an ever more pervasive impact on how girls and young women see themselves.

In a study⁹⁶ conducted by the City University of London on a sample of 175 girls aged between 18 and 30, 90% said they use a filter or edit their own photo before publishing it to uniformise the tone of the skin, reshape the nose or the jaw, look thinner, whiten the teeth, or make the skin look more tanned or golden.

Almost all the girls who participated in the research say they feel the pressure that is exerted on them to conform to a certain standard of beauty in which young and toned bodies dominate, as well as perfect skin, very white teeth and perfectly shaved legs. There is the awareness of being "bombarded" by images of unattainable beauty but, at the same time, *"if everyone changes their photos on social media, then you feel even more pressured to edit your photos so as not to feel left out, which contributes to fuelling the problem"*, according to the research. *"Having a sophisticated understanding of how these processes work does not make one immune."* The study also contains another element that helps to better understand how pervasive these filters are and how pressured girls feel to use them: 58% say they take up to 5 minutes to edit the photo before publishing it, 14% take between 5 to 10 minutes. And 7% more than 10 minutes.

What is more alarming is the fact that even very young girls (between 10 and 12 years old) look to these filters as tools to improve and change their appearance. *"I wish I had a filter right now"* is the phrase that Claire Pescott, a researcher at the University of South Wales, heard uttered by a little girl who was attending the last year of primary school. *"I'm interested in how children represent themselves, both in real life and on social medias. And I focused on the 10-11 year old children who attend the last grade of primary school in England and who are halfway between adolescence and infancy. At a time when they begin to build their relationships and social activities outside the family,"* she explained. An age where many children begin to have their own smartphones and profiles on the main social medias (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) even though - in theory - the minimum age to access these services is set at 13.

What Claire Pescott observed within the small group in which she conducted the study is that while the boys used Snapchat filters to have fun with friends (e.g. by applying bunny ears or similar) the girls made sure to improve your appearance. *"I found it quite shocking that 10-11 year old girls exhibit so explicitly ways of manipulating their perception of self at that age,"* Pescott explains. *"They talked to each other about the fact that if they had spots or freckles they could make their skin appear glowing, conforming to the people they saw online."*

And if some of the filters proposed by these applications are clearly recognizable (for example those that allow you to add stars or butterflies) others are "more subtle" and difficult to recognize when they are used. And they are used millions of times every day. And every day tens of millions of infants, girls and young women look at images that have been altered. *"I think this is emotionally damaging and I think it can really affect self-esteem,"* concludes Claire Pescott. *"For girls this has*

⁹⁶ Rosalind Gill, *Changing the perfect picture: Smartphones, social media and appearance pressures*, City, University of London, 2020 city.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/597209/Parliament-Report-web.pdf

always been a topic: I think of magazines and television. But with social medias everything is amplified: they observe this type of images every day, at any time”.

Chapter 14

Violence against young girls and teenage girls



Gender-based violence is the most pervasive and less conspicuous form of violation of human rights in the world. It is rooted in the imbalance of power that still exists between men and women. It takes many forms, ranging from physical to sexual violence, from psychological to economic violence. This is a worldwide phenomenon that does not spare a single country, culture, or social status. *“In all societies, women have less power than men when it comes to their choices, their body, or their financial resources. The social norms that allow the use of violence as a form of discipline strengthen and perpetuate gender-based violence. Women and girls - teenage girls, in particular - face the biggest risks”*, Unicef points out⁹⁷.

Violence against women and girls is a devastating and pervasive phenomenon. During their lifetime, about 736 million women and girls (one out of three) have suffered physical or sexual abuse from a relative, a partner, or a stranger. *“A number that has remained largely unchanged over the last ten years”*, highlights an important report⁹⁸ on the topic published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that analysed the data for the period from 2000 to 2018. *“Violence against women is endemic in all countries and cultures. It causes deep wounds in millions of women and their families, and has been exacerbated by the epidemic of COVID-19”*, said the director-general of WHO, Tedros Ghebreyesus. However, unlike the virus, violence against women cannot be fought with a vaccine.

⁹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies>

⁹⁸ WHO, Violence against women Prevalence Estimates 2018, March 2021, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>

The first alarming figure that emerges from the report is that gender-based violence manifests itself with a disturbing frequency already during adolescence. Among young women who are already married or in a relationship, aged between 15 and 19, one out of four has suffered physical and/or sexual abuse by their partner at least once. 16% of women from 15 to 24 years of age were subjected to some form of violence over the last 12 months. In absolute numbers, we are talking of about 15 million teenage girls subjected to sex against their will. In most cases, husbands, partners and boyfriends (or ex-boyfriends) perpetuate the violence⁹⁹.

The “*Global database on the prevalence of violence against women*”¹⁰⁰, a navigable map published on the WHO website, allows us to observe more closely what is happening in some countries. Focusing on the age group from 15 to 24, it is clear at a glance which countries have reached “epidemic” levels for gender-based violence against young women. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 47% of girls between the ages of 15 and 24 have been victims of violence at least once in their life and 38% have been subjected to violence by their partner during the last year. In Bangladesh, 46% of girls have been victims of domestic violence at least once in their life and 28% during the last year. In Papua New Guinea, more than half of the girls between 15 and 24 have experienced violence and abuse by their partners. Domestic violence concerned 43% of girls in Liberia, whereas 40% was concerned in Zambia. The share of young victims of domestic violence exceeds 30% also in Bolivia and Peru. As detailed as it may be, the database suffers from some deficiencies in Saudi Arabia, Russia, Somalia, Pakistan, and Korea.

When the law does not protect women

It bares remembering that, in several countries, wives cannot oppose their husbands when they “demand” to have sexual intercourse. “*Patriarchal standards support that, once celebrated the marriage, the husband “owns” the body of his wife and can have sex with her whenever he wants. Marital rape has been recognized as a violation of human rights only in the last decades*”, reads the most recent edition of the *State of the World Population* of the United Nations¹⁰¹. 73 countries do not have a law that punishes “marital rape”, and even in countries where a law is in force, the penalties provided for this kind of crime are lower than other types of violence.

This absence of laws protecting married women who endure violence at the hands of their husbands particularly penalises younger women, whether they be in arranged marriages or in marriages by choice. The *State of the World Population* highlights the close correlation between early marriages and “marital rapes”: younger women have fewer possibilities to defend themselves against these acts of violence, especially when the age difference with their husbands is enormous. Last but not least, laws that allow the rapist of a woman or of a young girl to avoid any penalty by marrying the victim are still in force in around 20 countries. Among them, there are Serbia, Russia, Algiers, Philippines, and Iraq¹⁰².

A particularly sour note concerns Turkey, which on July 1st has withdrawn from the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention and fight against violence on women. The Convention was

99 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

100 [https://srhr.org/vaw-data/map?](https://srhr.org/vaw-data/map?region=®ion_class=&violence_type=ipv&age_group=15_24&violence_time=lifetime)

[region=®ion_class=&violence_type=ipv&age_group=15_24&violence_time=lifetime](https://srhr.org/vaw-data/map?region=®ion_class=&violence_type=ipv&age_group=15_24&violence_time=lifetime)

101 UNPFA, *State of the World Population: My Body is My Own*, 2021 https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SoWP2021_Report_-_EN_web.3.21_0.pdf

102 *Ibidem*

signed in Istanbul ten years ago, and it represents a commitment for the around 34 countries (including Italy) that have ratified it. The news of the withdrawal was received with great concern by international institutions¹⁰³, but especially by Turkish feminist movements that have protested for years against the great diffusion of domestic violence. According to a national research conducted in 2014, 3 women out of 10 have married before the age of 18, and 48% of married girls under the age of 18 were exposed to physical violence¹⁰⁴. In 2020, 300 women died by femicide in the country.

The importance of fighting violence against women is emphasised in the last research¹⁰⁵ conducted by EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), which attempted to quantify its cost for society. In EU countries, the price amounts to 290 billion euros. *“The cost of human life, pain, and suffering cannot be quantified. However, knowing the cost of violence can help EU countries to channel the money where it is really needed and where it is more convenient”*, said Carlien Scheele, manager of EIGE. She has encouraged Member States to collect more precise data from public services such as law enforcements agencies and the justice sector, along with data from surveys, so as to obtain a more accurate calculation of the cost of gender-based violence in the EU.

Conflicts and humanitarian emergencies

In countries at war, countries suffering humanitarian emergencies, or refugee camps, the risk for women to endure sexual violence grows at an exponential rate. The consequences of COVID-19 during 2020 have made the living conditions of the population even more uncertain and reduced external action.

However, the subject of violence and abuses against teenage girls in conflicts *“remains an issue on which is made little research and interventions are insufficient”*, writes the researcher Lindsay Stark, co-author of *Gender-based violence against adolescent girls in humanitarian settings: a review of the evidence*¹⁰⁶. *“Because of a clear division (of humanitarian intervention, ed) between those who deal with child protection and those who deal with gender-based violence, teenage girls often are excluded from both groups, and the topic of violence against them is never talked about”*, explains the author.

Nevertheless, some data can help understand the gravity and urgency of tackling this phenomenon. In some humanitarian contexts, up to 26% of teenagers have suffered sexual violence by strangers while among the former “girl child soldiers” (young girls and teenage girls kidnapped and forced to fight under soldiers’ orders) the percentage of victims of rape oscillates between 29 and 44%.

A confirmation comes from the recent report¹⁰⁷ by Amnesty International on the multiple forms of sexual violence (rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and torture) perpetrated against ethnic Tigrayan women and girls since the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray in November 2020 by the forces of the Ethiopian federal government. Among the various dramatic testimonies collected by Amnesty that of a 16 year old girl captured while going to buy food and held captive for 3 days in a house by a group of soldiers including an officer, who raped her in turn. A 17-year-

103 <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/03/statement-un-women-turkey-withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention>

104 <http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/siddet2014/analiz.shtml>

105 <https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-based-violence-costs-eu-eu366-billion-year>

106 <https://source.wustl.edu/2020/11/adolescent-girls-at-high-risk-of-violence-in-humanitarian-settings/>

107 Amnesty International, ‘I Don’t Know If They Realized I Was a Person’: Rape and Sexual Violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, August 2021 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/>

old girl was kidnapped and forced to be sexually and verbally abused by 8 soldiers for 2 weeks. A doctor who rescued a raped girl had to extract from her vagina 2 nails, toilet paper, stones and plastic, which the rapists had inserted before letting her go. Such heinous cruelty demonstrates the operation of nullifying all humanity towards the civilian population, even the most vulnerable, by armed groups during conflicts. As one of the victims told Amnesty researchers, "I don't know if they realized I was a person."

Young refugees against gender-based violence

Barthelemy Mwanza is 27 years old. He was born in Lubumbashi, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but in 2012 he had to leave his country to escape the war and the violence. Like many other refugees, he settled in Zimbabwe and today lives in the refugee camp of Tongogara. Even if French is his mother language, Barthelemy speaks English and two other local languages (Swahili and Lingala) fluently. This allows him to get in touch with a multitude of people, in particular with teenage girls and boys. *"I have always been passionate about being in contact with the youngest, and I have been a volunteer for several NGO, including Terre des Hommes, since 2014", he explains. "My job is to identify and connect the topics and problems of the community of refugees in the camp. At some point, I happened upon the topic of gender-based violence, and I decided to commit myself to this issue as well. I have a sister, and it is something that could happen to her too. Gender-based violence can take different forms: it can be psychological, physical, or sexual. Sadly, many girls have normalised certain behaviours since they were children, as, for example, the practice of marrying very young, without thinking about it."*

One of the activities that kept him mostly engaged on this front is the EMAP project (*Engaging Men and Boys Through Accountable Practices*), the aim of which is to involve young people and men in the refugee camp to combat the causes that are at the root of gender inequalities and violence against women and girls. It is a place where people from different countries live, where at least ten languages are spoken, and it is necessary to reckon with the cultural and religious differences existing among the various communities. *"We talk with men and try to explain to them that certain behaviours are wrong because they violate girls' rights",* tells Barthelemy. *"We must move away from some practices, even if they are well-established, because violence can destroy the community."* This type of activity is not always easy. He says that he had arguments with some pastors who accused him of not accepting what was written in the Bible, namely that man must always be in charge of the family. *"One of the most demanding challenges for me is to deal with older men",* he concludes. *"They see how old I am and tell me that I am too young, that I am not married, that I am not experienced enough to give them advice on this subject. But I know that, sooner or later, things will change".*

Violence Against Minors in Italy - The Effects of Covid-19

The percentage of crimes against minors was reduced between 2019 and 2020, albeit only moderately. Compared to the previous year, in fact, according to the data processed for Terre des Hommes by the Criminal Analysis Service of the Criminal Police Central Directorate, the number of victims of crimes under the age of 18 went from **5,939 to 5,789**, with a reduction of 3%.

Crimes against children in Italy

	2010		2019		2020		Δ% 2010- 2020	Δ% 2019- 2020
	Victims < 18	Of which are females	Victims < 18	Of which are females	Victims < 18	Of which are females		
Voluntary manslaughter*	26	35%	14	36%	14	43%	-46%	0%
Negligence of family duties	688	53%	631	49%	561	50%	-18%	-11%
Misuse of force during discipline	186	44%	403	41%	257	45%	38%	-36%
Mistreatment within family	1.004	54%	2.101	54%	2.377	53%	137%	13%
Child abduction	185	47%	237	49%	246	48%	33%	4%
Abandonment of minors	319	49%	510	43%	469	43%	47%	-8%
Child prostitution	140	84%	56	63%	37	73%	-74%	-34%
Possession of pedopornographic material	16	81%	88	84%	100	83%	525%	14%
Child pornography	66	73%	251	75%	248	74%	276%	-1%
Sexual violence	763	84%	637	86%	554	88%	-27%	-13%
Sexual acts with minors	445	75%	444	77%	350	80%	-21%	-21%
Corruption of minors	132	77%	164	77%	138	73%	5%	-16%
Aggravated sexual assault	349	79%	403	81%	438	89%	26%	9%
total	4.319	64%	5.939	61%	5.789	65%	34%	-3%

This is not a surprising figure and must be taken in the context of a particular year, 2020, which was distinguished by the pandemic and by long periods of social isolation and, consequently, by a marked reduction in reported crimes, which saw a decline of as much as 18,9%, as reported by Censis.

In particular, the following are in decline: the cases of abuse of correctional and disciplinary means (-36%, but +38% over a decade), those of Child Prostitution (-34% and -74% over the decade), Sexual acts with minors aged under 14 (-21% with a stable trend over ten years), cases of Corruption of Minors (-16%, a rise by 5% since 2010) and those of "sexual violence" (-13 %). A separate case is that of the rise of aggravated sexual violence, whose victims have increased by 9%, a crime which, by virtue of the changes introduced in article 609 of the Criminal Code with the Law 69/2019 (the so-called Red Code), will in the near future include all the instances of sexual violence against minors under the age of 18, where the previous version of the text established that only the fact of not having turned 14 should be considered as an aggravating circumstance.

The Danger Increases in Family Circumstances...

Social isolation, as demonstrated also by the overall increase in cases of domestic violence (+72%, 1522 telephone calls received from the domestic abuse hotline from March to October 2020), almost inevitably leads to an increase in family tensions. It exposed children and teenagers (as well as their mothers) to a greater risk of abuse. It is no coincidence, therefore, that ill-treatment of family members and cohabitants under the age of 18 has increased by 13% in the last year, with a dramatic rise of +137% from 2010 to 2020.

... And Through Telematic Means

In a year in which telematic crimes grew by 13.9%, it is not surprising that even crimes such as the possession of pornographic material exploiting minors are increasing sharply, with a jump of 14%, and even 525% over a 10-year period, a fact that highlights the need for a constant prevention that must start from within the family and the school environment. It also requires the commitment to a major crackdown, because clearly the increase in demand is always accompanied by an increase

in supply, that is, from the underground and profitable criminal activity of producing pornographic material with the use of younger and younger children.

Young Girls are Increasingly the First Victims

Women, young girls and female children are undoubtedly the ones who will pay the most for the effects of this crisis: the increase in violence, the absence of school, the loss of employment and purchasing power and family burdens, has weighed above all on their backs. The data of the Criminal Analysis Service of the Central Directorate of the Criminal Police gives us a sombre confirmation: in 65% of cases, one of the highest figures ever recorded in our historical series, the victims of these crimes were precisely young girls, peaking at 89% for cases of Aggravated Sexual Violence and 88% for those of Sexual Violence. But even within environment of the home, in 53% of cases of maltreatment, the crime was committed on their bodies and psyches.

More Possible Readings

The picture that emerges from the data collected in collaboration with the Criminal Analysis Service of the Criminal Police Central Directorate allows for different readings. On the positive side, the data underlines, even in a year of social "isolation", how widespread the awareness of one's rights is, even within the confines, once considered sacred, of the home: today reporting is an easier choice for many women and girls. The police forces and institutions are also more and more ready to manage what are often delicate situations, which must be treated with respect and the utmost attention.

On the other hand, the data also tells us that the family, which in the vast majority of cases has held up well in giving children and adolescents protection and serenity, must be offered more help in dealing with their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This is true especially, but not only, in difficult moments such as those we have all been called to face in recent months. This is a role that organizations such as Terre des Hommes are carrying out with innovative projects such as TIMMI¹⁰⁸ or NidoInsieme¹⁰⁹, but which must also be guaranteed greater public investments in support of parenthood.

A final note concerns the need, all the more evident during the *lockdown*, to work more on the literacy and digital security of this country: it is not only the data on crimes that suggest it, but above all the Italian boys and girls who, as evidenced by the research¹¹⁰ conducted by Terre des Hommes and ScuolaZoo, feel less and less safe online, and increasingly sense the risk of becoming victims of cyberbullying and online sexual harassment.

A worrying picture

In Italy, child maltreatment is a tragic reality which requires appropriate measures to prevent and combat it. In 2021, Terre des Hommes presented the second **National survey on child maltreatment in Italy**. The survey, conducted by the Italian Authority for Children and Adolescents, together with Cismai, represents Italy's most up-to-date and complete national source on the epidemiological aspect of child maltreatment.

108 See <https://spaziotimmi.terredeshommes.it/> and <https://casaditimmi.terredeshommes.it/>

109 See <https://www.nidoinsieme.it/>

110 <https://terredeshommes.it/comunicati/bullismo-cyberbullismo-parlano-ragazzi-dati-dellosservatorio-indifesa/>

More than 400,000 children were taken into care by social services in 2018, with almost 77,500 of these children being victims of maltreatment. Young men and boys represent the majority of those in the care of social services. However, **young women and girls are more frequently in care due to maltreatment** (201 out of 1000, compared to 186 out of 1000 among boys).

The main types of maltreatment are the following: nature of care (lack of care, inappropriate care and excessive care), which 40.7% of minors in the care of Social Services are victims of; witnessing violence (32.4%); psychological abuse (14.1%); physical abuse (9.6%); sexual abuse (3.5%).

Compared to 2013, there has been a 14.8% increase in the numbers of maltreated minors taken into care in the municipalities that took part in both surveys.

For the full survey, visit **bit.ly/3zJr3FI**

Underage Abuse Victims - Police Force Data

In 2020, a year characterized by the epidemiological emergency of COVID-19, information from the Police Force shows an increase in the number of victims of solicitation of minors, abduction of vulnerable people and aggravated sexual violence. This data, however, is not exclusively negative, as it could reveal a greater propensity to report the crimes in question.

The growing attention that parents, educators, psychologists, police forces and social workers pay to minors, in fact, nurtures a robust synergy capable of allowing for the exposure of "submerged violence", which is often hidden in silence.

Expanding the temporal horizon to the last decade, it is noted that the most committed crimes are maltreatment of family members and cohabitants, child pornography and sexual acts involving minors; in particular, the crime of maltreatment of family members and cohabitants and that of child pornography show a very significant growth over the course of the decade. Female victims are the most prevalent, while most of the perpetrators of the crimes in question are male.

With regard to the prevention and suppression of all behaviour to the detriment of minors, the Police Force have for many years been investing considerable resources in specific training of their personnel. It is believed, in fact, that the most effective tool to stem this phenomenon is to have all the adequate knowledge to immediately recognize the signs of violence and intervene, in the shortest possible time, in order to protect minors. In addition, we continue to work to enhance collaboration with medical experts and psychologists with the aim of constantly raising the quality of services offered to citizens.

The Criminal Analysis Service

The Criminal Analysis Service, anchored within the Central Direction of the Criminal Police of the Department of Public Security, represents a central pillar for the informative anti-crime coordination and for the strategic joint analysis of criminal phenomena and constitutes a useful support for the National Authority of Public Security and Police Force.

It is composed as an interforce structure: in fact, staff of various roles and qualifications work there, including the State Police, the Carabinieri, the Finance Police and the Penitentiary Police. This makes it a tool capable of synthesizing and implementing cooperation between the various police forces on a national level. For these purposes, the Criminal Analysis Service elaborates

studies and conducts research on analysis techniques, develops joint integrated projects, uses electronic police archives and links them with other databases. It also promotes specific in-depth initiatives of an interforce nature, edits the analysis of the statistical data of the criminal police, and links with national, European and international research bodies. Besides, it monitors mafia infiltration attempts in the contracting procedures for works relating to the construction of strategic operations and the recovery of areas affected by natural disasters.

Stefano Delfini, Director of the Criminal Analysis Service of the Criminal Police Central Directorate

The following recommendations are addressed to the Italian institutions:

- Centre the voices of girls and boys through programmes aimed at supporting their involvement in decisions concerning their present and future, paying particular attention to gender issues. Girls and boys are the best experts in their daily life, their priorities and their needs, but it is the girls who encounter the greatest difficulty in making their voices heard and who risk suffering some form of isolation, harassment or violence when they have the courage to speak out.
- Promote and fund studies, research and data collection whose data are disaggregated by gender and age. We need new investigations to understand what implications public policies have on generational and gender issues, even when they may seem impartial. And we need to reorient them so as to close the wealth and power gap that continues to exist.
- Implement the commitments made with the European and National Gender Equality Strategies and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, continue to monitor the achievement of the specific targets set and intervene with corrective actions in the case of deviations from initial expectations. In order that gender equality remain central to every action, it will be necessary to adopt flexible planning processes down to the definition of the programmes and their budgets, which take into account the targets according to age and gender and make allowance for the additional characteristics of vulnerability, such as geographical areas or particularly vulnerable social groups.
- Work to remove any kind of gender-based obstacle or legislative discrimination, starting with the *tampon tax*, which continues to place an unjustified burden on the shoulders of girls and women.
- Invest in integrated services in the country to support the southern regions, where gender inequality is most pronounced, beginning with the enhancement of local healthcare, the development of fast connections and the full funding of advantageous taxation when hiring girls and young women.
- Improve training for workers of social and health services, law enforcement and teaching staff so they are able to detect in advance the warning signs of conditions that undermine the rights of girls and young women of foreign origin, such as, for example, child and forced marriage, sex trafficking and exploitation and female genital mutilation. Allocate adequate resources so that anti-violence and anti-trafficking centres can provide appropriate care.
- Promote professional training courses aimed at closing the *gender gap*, promoting in particular STEM education, entrepreneurship education, training in economics and finance, as well as university orientation programmes in schools.

- Introduce and promote in the school system learning programmes in emotive capacity and diversity, these are useful in transferring models that respect gender equality and bring about societal transformations, and in eliminating violence and gender stereotypes.
- Support educational institutions and publishing houses, in collaboration with private social organisations and student movements, in the promotion of more inclusive educational models and in the creation of school texts revised in light of the important contributions made by women to the history of humanity in all fields.
- Sensitise local institutions towards the adoption of a new civic culture of remembrance that gives due credit to the contribution of women through statues and the naming of new streets, including through the involvement of students from schools at all levels.
- Guarantee adequate spaces and structures wherein boys and girls can practise sports, support the commitment of sports federations at every level to encourage the participation of boys and girls in sport, this is an essential factor in children's growth and in the transfer of positive values of respect, equality and inclusion.
- Through Public Service Broadcasting, clear all forms of gender stereotypes and discrimination in broadcasting and the old patriarchal and sexist models still dominant in our country.
- Within the framework of the Italian strategies for international cooperation, always adopt a gender perspective in assessments for the allocation of funding and increase funds to ensure access for girls and boys to a quality higher education, a proper education in economics and finance, information services and assistance in sexual and reproductive health and courses in emotive education, including in humanitarian and environmental emergencies.
- Promote the creation of programmes to prevent gender-based discrimination, stereotypes and violence in international fora and ensure that development programmes, as well as humanitarian interventions, promote gender equality, especially among the most vulnerable sections of the population, focusing in particular on tackling all forms of gender-based violence, including child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and on providing quality education, including in economics and finance, to girls and boys from a young age. These programmes must receive adequate financial resources for their implementation.

Lobby in international contexts for all world governments to ratify the various international resolutions, optional protocols included, to ensure the protection of the rights of girls and young women.



From 2012 to today: Terre des Hommes celebrates its first 10 years in the commitment of the **indifesa Campaign to **defend** young girls and female teenagers**

Child brides, teenage mothers, domestic slaves, mutilated girls, girls trafficked for sexual purposes, teenagers forced to leave school and suffer abuses with frustrating frequency. Faced with these terrible examples of abuse and inequality in 2012, Terre des Hommes launched the **indifesa Campaign** on the occasion of the First International Day of the Girl Child to say NEVER AGAIN to violence and every form of discrimination based even today on gender.

A commitment that has employed our finest resources, involved dozens of partners, institutions, *influencers*, public figures and millions of Italians, and that has received important awards, notably the Medal of the Presidency of the Republic. All this has been done to change, we hope once and for all, the way in which gender violence towards female children and girls is reported and experienced.

Research, in-depth discussion, conferences, events, promotions to raise awareness and engage Italian public opinion have been actively mirrored by concrete actions to help young girls and female teenagers in Italy, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Ecuador, Jordan, India, Iraq, Mozambique, Nicaragua and Peru.

Putting all this into a few pages is not easy, but let's think back to just some of our milestones.

| Indifesa dossier

Since 2012, the continuously updated dossier on the "**Condition of young girls and female teenagers in Italy and the world**" has constituted the point of reference for institutions, the media and associations dealing with the issue of gender. A unique document of its kind that considers both Italian and the international dimensions.

| **Indifesa Blog**

The news you won't find on any other Italian information space; stories of hope and change from the girls who are survivors and the communities which are attempting original ways of responding to abuse and gender discriminations. Launched in 2015 and edited by the journalist Ilaria Sesana, the **difesa Blog** is the place where the Terre des Hommes campaign becomes daily news.

| **Young Girl News: Terre des Hommes – Ansa**

News reports, all too often "grim reading" about murders, abuse, violence and offenses involving young girls and female teenagers, collected by Terre des Hommes in collaboration with ANSA (the National Associated Press Agency) which has made available to us its immense electronic document archive (DEA). This was the dossier **Young Girl Chronicles**", submitted in 2012. A report as shocking as the main data it yielded: 6 news reports every day about incidents of crimes and abuse against female minors!

| **First comparative research on the legislation tackling the abuse of girls and women**

Terre des Hommes presented at the November 2012 European Council International Conference, entitled "**The Role of International Cooperation in tackling Sexual Violence against Children**". It was held at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The presentation was of the **first comparative study on legislation tackling violence against girls and women**, carried out with law firm **Paul Hastings'** pro bono support. That study was released to the public at the 57th session of the CSW (Commission on the Status of Women), at the UN's New York Headquarters in March.

| **The Girl Declaration and a petition in support of Maud Chifamba**

A preview of the **Girl Declaration** was presented at the 2014 **Indifesa** conference. This **online petition**, hosted on **Change.org**, aimed to bring young Zimbabwean Maud Chifamba (one of Forbes' five most influential women of the African continent in 2013 and a Terre des Hommes delegate) to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015. The aim there was to set the new objectives for the **2030 Agenda**, requesting more attention and resources be assigned to girls' education. **The petition collected more than 94,000 signatures.**

| **Di Pari Passo: meetings to prevent and raise awareness of gender discrimination in lower secondary education in Italy**

For two years, Terre des Hommes **ran a programme in collaboration with Soccorso Rosa (which offers psychological and legal assistance to female victims of sexual abuse) and the San Carlo Hospital. The purpose of the Di Pari Passo programme was to hold meetings to prevent and raise awareness of gender discrimination in lower secondary schools** (ages 11 to 14), in order to combat preconceptions and discriminatory behaviour in preadolescents and to provide teachers and parents with effective tools for identifying difficult and potentially dangerous situations. This led to the first manual aimed at lower secondary schools, with the same title as the programme, "*Di Pari Passo*". It was produced with the support of the Italian Government's Equal Opportunities Department and published by **Settenove**.

| **The indifesa Watchdog**

Since 2014, Terre des Hommes has been collaborating with **Scuola Zoo** to continue the **indifesa** watchdog. The watchdog aims to listen to Italian boys and girls' voices when it comes to gender violence, discrimination, bullying, cyberbullying and sexting. Since it began, almost 30,000 boys and girls from across Italy have been involved in what is, today, the only permanent watchdog for such issues. This tool is vital in guiding policies made by Italian institutions and the education sector.

| **Mistreatment of children and training for doctors and paediatricians**

Violence against children is most often violence against girls. It was our awareness of this, which we owe to indifesa, that pushed us to explore the matter of children being mistreated and abused. In 2013, we presented our study "**Maltreatment of children: how Milan's physicians recognise it**", in partnership with Milan's Mangiagalli maternity clinic and SBAM (Sportello Bambino Adolescente Maltrattato, a help service for mistreated teenagers). In 2014, a need for more information from doctors and paediatricians led to a collaboration between Terre des Hommes, SVSeD (emergency service for victims of sexual and domestic abuse) and the Milan Medical Association. Together they created a **handbook** for doctors and paediatricians **on managing instances** (or suspected instances) of **child mistreatment**. That handbook has been distributed across Milan's healthcare facilities and is available online at **<https://bit.ly/2QbCRde>**. Various regions have adopted this idea, adapting it to their local situations. In November 2014, at the University of Milan, the first postgraduate course began on "**Diagnosing Child Abuse and Neglect**". It is aimed at general practitioners, paediatricians and students of these disciplines and promoted by Terre des Hommes, the Milan Medical Association and the SVSeD.

In October 2019 we opened the **Timmi space** at the Children's Hospital Vittore Buzzi of Milan, which offers listening and support to fragile families, aimed to preventing violence against children. The service is financed by **Esselunga**.

In the last few years, Terre des Hommes has been committed to promoting the **first ever network of outstanding paediatric hospitals, which have specialist teams dedicated to diagnosing and managing child victims of violence**. The participating centres are: Bambi Service" at the Turin City Health and Science University Hospital; **SVSeD**

(emergency services for victims of sexual and domestic abuse) at the Ca' Granda General Hospital's Institute for Treatment and Research in Milan; Milan's "Vittore Buzzi" Children's Hospital; **the Regional Centre for Diagnosing Mistreatment of Children** (a crisis unit for children and families) at Padua Hospital Trust; **GAIA** (a service for abused children and adolescents) at the Meyer University Hospital in Florence; **GIADA psychology service (interdisciplinary group assisting women and abused children)** at Bari University Hospital "Hospital John XXIII". In 2016, Terre des Hommes and this network of hospitals attended a press conference at the Italian Senate's "Giovanni Spadolini" Library, to present the Dossier "**Maltreatment and abuse of children: a matter of public health**". The Italian version can be downloaded at <https://bit.ly/2QcI fva>.

| **Monitoring child abuse in Italy and investigating the price of insufficient prevention policies**

In collaboration with the CISMAI (an association of Italian services fighting maltreatment and child abuse) and as part of its **indifesa** campaign, Terre des Hommes has begun some innovative research in Italy:

- the first **national survey examining how widespread child mistreatment is in Italy**. This study was produced in 2013 in collaboration with ANCI (the association of Italian municipalities) and is titled "**Maltreatment of children: how widespread is this in Italy?**" The Italian version is available online at bit.ly/1IzfYPs.
- the first **study** carried out in Italy (with the assistance of the **Bocconi University** of Milan in 2013) **analysing the cost of not preventing the maltreatment and abuse of children in the country**. It is available online at bit.ly/1qyjN6K.
- In 2015, we conducted, together with CISMAI, the "**National survey on child maltreatment in Italy**", at the request of the Italian Authority for Children and Adolescents. It is the first survey that captures the real dimension of child maltreatment in our country.
- In 2021, we presented the updated version of the survey, whose figures portray a dramatic reality. Indeed, institutions and policy makers have to discuss its data in order to draw up efficient prevention policies. Available online: bit.ly/3zJr3FI

| **The #indifesa manifesto for an Italy that works for young girls and female teenagers**

Since 2017 we have been asking the Italian Municipalities to work with us to keep improving our cities and to support young girls and female teenagers. More than 100 municipalities, towns and cities - including the largest, such as Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, Genoa, Bari and Palermo - have signed up each year for the project. Their commitment has proved to be exceptional, including their efforts to raise awareness of the matter. Many municipalities have "dressed up" in orange to speak out against violence and gender discrimination. They have also organised events and discussion sessions and have involved local schools in their initiatives, leading to the participation of thousands of students of all ages. Additionally in 2019, a request was issued to Italy's municipalities and regions, in an attempt to spread **indifesa's** message.

The institutions are required to make a range of commitments, including: adopting a Charter promoting girls' rights, around which they should base all municipal policies, especially those aimed at preventing violence and gender discrimination (taking FIDAPA BPW's girls' Charter as an example); promoting the collection of data, through local schools, on discrimination, gender-based violence, sexting, bullying and cyberbullying; involving teachers, educators, anti-violence centres, local associations and networks of parents in educating children and adolescents and promoting awareness on how to prevent violence, gender discrimination, bullying, cyberbullying and sexting;

where there is already a violence prevention plan in place, ensuring that the specific matters addressed in the Charter are included; mapping all the projects the nation offers in relation to these issues.

| **indifesa: a docu-film about girls abused and exploited in Peru**

It is a story of violence and beauty, sadness and joy, told through the eyes of two young actors who are plunged into a world light years away from their own everyday lives. **Brando Pacitto** and **Mirko Trovato** are famous for playing the lead roles in RAI I fiction series, "Braccialetti Rossi". Together, they take a **trip to Peru** to get a better understanding of the Terre des Hommes projects and support the beneficiaries of **indifesa's** programmes, which aim to tackle the abuse and exploitation of Andean girls in the Cusco area. It is an intense and exhausting journey on which the two young actors discover a very complex world full of contradictions. Directed by: Duccio Giordano. Produced by: Palomar.

Stand Up for Girls

The new initiative for 2018 was **Stand Up for Girls**: an evening event packed with short talks organised together with 5x15 Italia at the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in Milan. This initiative had the same goal of our #OrangeRevolution: to change the way we look at gender issues and deconstruct the stereotypes and discrimination that are rooted in our mentality and passed down from generation to generation.

In 2019 the speakers of Stand Up for Girls included Stefania Andreoli, adolescent psychotherapist; Alessandra De Tommasi, journalist; Diana Gini, student of the ScuolaZoo community; Germano Lanzoni, actor and web star; Marianne Mirage, singer-songwriter; Diego Passoni, radio and television host; and Stella Pulpo, writer and creator of the blog "Memories of a Vagina". A special moment was **Nandhini's** testimony – a young ambassador of the fight against child and forced marriages in India. She was accompanied on stage by Maria Grazia Calandrone, poetess and RAI presenter who had written a powerful text based on the young lady's story.

The ProteggiMI Tour for the Childhood and Adolescent Guarantor of Milan

In 2018, Terre des Hommes launched the project **"Childhood and Adolescent Guarantor - Support actions"** whose main objectives were the spread of knowledge of children's rights among the children themselves and among the operators who deal with them in various ways in the city of Milan. Created for the Office of the Guarantor for Childhood and Adolescence of the Municipality of Milan, the project was working on 4 levels, which were all interconnected (school, research, health, and campaigns on the communication and promotion of rights) with the collaboration of various partners. Almost 1,000 high school students participated in the **ProteggiMI Tour**, carried out in collaboration with **ScuolaZoo**, to reflect on delicate issues such as **violence and gender discrimination, bullying, cyberbullying and sexting** in order to stimulate the involvement of students to take positive actions. Campoteatrale created the show **JukeBox of Rights** on the issues of hardships in adolescence and it was replicated several times in Milan. On the same theme was made the short film "Invisible".

A statue for the abused girls

In June 2020 Terre des Hommes launched a petition to ask the Mayor of Milan Beppe Sala to dedicate a statue to all the girls who are victims of abuse and violence. This is to give a tangible and lasting sign of the commitment of our community to reverse the course and move towards a more equal and fairer society, where every child can grow up sheltered from violence and fully express their potential.

Many personalities from the world of politics, culture and entertainment have already signed up to the petition, which you can sign at this link: <https://bit.ly/PetizioneStatua>

On 13th July 2021, the exhibition **Scolpite** - promoted by the Culture department of the Municipality of Milan and organised by the Women Photographers' Associations together with Terre des Hommes - was inaugurated at the Milan Royal Palace. Through the eyes of 35 female artists, the exhibition, which is open until September 5th, aims to actively contribute to the promotion of an open vision and critique of the female figure in the collective imagination. The exhibition also intends to invite others to reconsider the presence of women in sculpture and, in particular, their absence in public sculpture. All of this using photographic language. However, the winds of change have begun to blow: with the patronage of the Municipality, the first statues dedicated to important female characters have been declared: revolutionary princess Cristina Trivulzio Belgioioso and astronomer Margherita Hack.

Indifesa Network, young advocates against gender discrimination

In 2018, Terre des Hommes, together with the Kreattiva association, brought to life the **Indifesa Network**, the first Italian network of Web Radio and young advocates against discrimination, stereotypes and gender violence. The network - founded upon the active participation and leadership of boys and girls in all of the phases of the project - stimulated high-school students to found radio programmes focused on the knowledge and consideration regarding violence, discrimination and gender stereotypes.

Radio Indifesa's network went viral throughout the entire nation thanks to the grants given by the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Prime Minister's Office, BIC® and the BIC® Foundation. 14 Web Radios from across the nation have already joined the network. In the past year, 200 hours of radio broadcasts and podcasts were produced.

For information and to listen to the podcasts: www.networkindifesa.org.

#IoGiocoAllaPari [I play evenly] - Palestra di Diritti e Competenze [Exercising Rights and Skills]

In 2020, Terre des Hommes together with Junior Achievement Italia, initiated the course **#IoGiocoAllaPari - Palestra di Diritti e Competenze**, a generational and gender equality empowerment course addressed to **male and female upper-secondary students**. A project that combines the awareness regarding rights with that concerning skills thanks to an innovative training course based on role modelling. The project is composed of 15 online workshops and is held by just as many «Dream Coaches», experts and professionals, reference voices in their respective fields of expertise. During the academic year 2020-2021, the course **#IoGiocoAllaPari** involved more than 230 male and female students and teachers across Italy.

To follow the project and watch the workshops: <https://www.iogiocoallapari.it/>

#IoGiocoAllaPari is also the hashtag of our social campaign to promote a process of essential change for a different world, where every girl has her own rights guaranteed and where she can grow her own talents and reach her own dreams. A world where we all play evenly, in any kind of field.

Consultami – Indifesa space

On 20th October 2020, we opened the first Indifesa headquarters in Parma's one of the most difficult neighbourhood, thanks to Bata's support. It is a free consultant office for women, girls and children who had been subject to physical, psychological or economic violence. It offers psychological support, a legal desk together with many other services also provided by local schools and associations, with the aim to prevent violence, gender discrimination and promote social inclusion. The project has been created in cooperation with the association of social promotion Intesa San Martino, sponsored by the Municipality of Parma, and realised with the

cooperation between AiGA Parma (Italian Association of Young Lawyers), OPP (Parma Observatory of Psychologists), Munus Onlus Foundation and the Social Library Roberta Venturini.

In September 2021, in the Gallarate Neighbourhood of Milan, we inaugurated the Indifesa Hub, in cooperation with the Food Policy of the Municipality of Milan and the Milan Foundation. In addition to hosting a supportive market for distributing food surpluses to families in need, this place will also contain a multifunctional centre that will organise educational and training activities for children, girls and women, and a support desk for families. Some of the Hub's partners are: IBVA, the Italian Red Cross in Milan, Rimaflow, STAG, QuBi's network of Gallarate, Mitades, Paloma 2000, Mamme a Scuola and Global Thinking Foundation.

Indifesa at Women20

On 15th July 2021, Terre des Hommes attended the W20 of Rome, with the participation of Federica Giannotta in the *Young Girls' Voice* section. Her participation highlighted the organisation's commitment to protect, empower and involve girls giving some recommendations to institutions in order to reach gender equality.

At the Women20 summit, hundreds of leaders, experts and role models participated from around the world to discuss the most urgent issues concerning women's social, economic and political empowerment and to provide the G20 leaders with concrete proposals to improve young girls and women's conditions and create a fairer, more inclusive and prosperous society.

Media and social network campaigns

Exclusive content, international partners, dozens of celebrity endorsements: the **indifesa** campaign has always been one step ahead, predicting the themes and issues on which many organisations have begun to spend money in recent years. It has reached millions of Italians, through the national and local TG channels, the press, informative websites, local authority websites and thousands of social network profiles and pages. It's a journey that began in 2012, when for the first time "**IO Donna**" magazine dedicated a memorable cover piece to indifesa, featuring actresses Nicoletta Romanoff and Sabrina Impacciatore and Olympic champion Valentina Vezzali, until the media partnership in 2020.

Despite the difficulties encountered during the pandemic, the **Indifesa** campaign reached almost 800 hits on the internet, including some broadcasts on national and local tv, major radio stations, news agencies, newspapers and websites. **#IoGiocoAllaPari** has exceeded a total potential reach of 22 million having 650 social contents.

Companies for indifesa

In 2021, the Indifesa projects were supported by BATA, BIC®, BIC® Foundation, Douglas, Esserbella (perfume chain of the Esselunga Group), Zanetti Foundation, Milan Foundation, MainAD, OneDay Group, Sorigenia, Valvorobica.

Celebrity endorsements

Every year many people coming from the following fields: sporting, entertainment and social media line up to stand up for girls and, together with Terre des Hommes, they become spokespeople for their rights and liberties on the occasion of the International Day of the Girl Child. Founded as the

#OrangeRevolution, this great mobilisation continues to give a voice to girls around the world under the hashtag **#IoGiocoAllaPari**. On 11th October, thousands of social media profiles become **orange**, the colour chosen by Terre des Hommes and the United Nations to say **NO to gender violence and break gender stereotypes**, with the common goal to trigger a change among men and women, boys and girls, towards a different world, where every girl has her own rights guaranteed and where she can grow - free from violence and discrimination - her own talents and reach own dreams. **A world where boys and girls play evenly**. In any field.
