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Proteggiamo i bambini insieme

**indifes** 

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# *The Condition of the Girl Child worldwide*

*by Terre des Hommes*

*Fifth Edition- 2016*



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

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

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*Since 50 years, Terre des Hommes is in the front line to protect children worldwide from violence, abuse and exploitation and to ensure every child with schooling, informal education, medical assistance and food.*

*Terre des Hommes is currently present in 69 countries with 1,046 projects in favour of children. Terre des Hommes Foundation Italy is member of the Terre des Hommes International Federation; it works in partnership with ECHO and is accredited by the European Union, the UN, USAID and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

For additional information please visit:

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## **Preface**

In the last five years, i.e. how old turned the Campaign “Indifesa” (*Defenceless*) in 2016, that was launched by Terre des Hommes in 2012, the world has become smaller. One can actually say that the derangements following the Arab Spring in 2011 reshuffled what is stable and what produces instability; between those, who live in a peaceful world, and those, who try to survive in areas affected by violence. All that significantly reduced the distance between those, who live there, along the Mediterranean coast, and those, who live here.

Such deep disorder made even more acute, visible and tangible also for the so called developed world all the serious violations of the human rights suffered by little girls and girls: on the one hand the widespread political instability and violence made even more precarious the little girls and young women’s conditions on the Mediterranean southern coast, where they were already fragile; and on the other hand the migration flows further worsened them, matching at the same time the conditions of those young and very young migrants to those of the European girls of the same age. Those five years confirmed that the work done through the Campaign “Indifesa” and the related Dossier on the conditions of girls worldwide is absolutely useful, as it supports the phenomena traceability and progress comparison in a world changing very quickly, thus making the youngest ones even more vulnerable. However, 2016 is also a special year for another reason: perhaps this year, with the election of the UN Secretary General and especially the US president, we might have an increased representation of women at global level, opening a season of even greater commitment in support of the weakest ones among us, starting from the youngest, who are twice as vulnerable.

**Lia Quartapelle**  
**House of Representatives - XVII Legislation**  
**Foreign affairs Committee**



*Photo: Alberto Molinari*

## **Introduction**

Five years: a magic age for a child. At the end of the time of total dependence from parents' caregiving, a time of great expectations for the future starts, when girls are more aware of themselves and the others and have an incredible energy, that will lead to the development of their personal capabilities. The fifth year of age marks the end of the critical period for children deaths and the approach to the education path, that for good or bad will shape the working prospects and the life quality as an adult.

Our Campaign "Indifesa", that was established to celebrate the UN's *International Day of the Girl Child* from its very start in 2012, also turned five. Through such initiative, that thrilled us from the beginning, we aimed at raising awareness among institutions and general public on the serious violations of the rights suffered by little girls and girls, that we detect every day worldwide, as well as on the importance to protect and support them, to develop the full potential of that important, but particularly vulnerable, part of population. The UN's new Sustainable Development Goals emphasize how the future of the world literally puts the little girls' skin at stake and that to create a fairer and more liveable world for all, we shall ensure safety, education and rights for the new generations of women.

In those five years commitment to draw the general attention on phenomena like infanticide, child marriages, domestic exploitation of minor servants, we highlighted that in our country as well females are clearly more often among the minor victims of crimes in Italy, according to the observatory "Interforze" for the Campaign "Indifesa", and among the minors taken into care by

social services due to mistreatment, as emerges from an investigation of the competition authority for childhood carried out by Terre des Hommes and CISMAI in over 230 Italian municipalities.

In those five years we saw the issue of domestic violence coming into the limelight, making everybody aware, young people included, that domestic violence, as we explain in those pages, is a phenomenon of great concern, to be prioritized in the political agenda in order to prevent and avoid it.

In those five years we tried to offer different instruments to understand and implement efficient strategies to avoid violence on children, from the publication of a school manual on the prevention of discrimination and gender-based violence, to the drawing up of a Charter supporting the respect for the image of children and opposing gender stereotypes in advertisements. The campaign's recipients and the following trends are many, including doctors and paediatricians, who often have doubts in recognising children mistreatments and reporting them. We prepared a dedicated quick reference handbook and promoted a specialization university course on early diagnosis of *Child Abuse*.

As for media and general public, we drew up five editions of this Dossier, full of data and testimonies, and since the end of 2015 the web site of Terre des Hommes hosts the Blog "Indifesa", with complaints and histories of little girls and girls worldwide, that are not covered by the media *mainstream* and sometimes anticipated subjects and characters that then become highly topical. We therefore hope to have laid the foundations, so as to contribute to the start of a new cycle, where national and international institutions implement efficient policies to protect little girls and girls against abuses, prevent discriminations and ensure the protection of their specific needs, in order to prevent violence and negligence from stifling their gorgeous fit towards the future.

**Terre des Hommes Italia Foundation**





*Photo: Francesco Cabras*

## **Chapter 1 – Sex-selective abortion and girls infanticide**

Every year a million and a half girls are killed worldwide before being born, due to sex-selective abortions. It is like the entire female population in a city as big as Nairobi would disappear in one

go<sup>1</sup>. China (57%) and India (30%) hold the sad record among the countries where, sex-selective abortions are performed. However, the phenomenon records significant number also in Pakistan, Vietnam e South Korea in Asia, as well as in Azerbaijan, Armenia e Georgia in the Caucasus and in Montenegro and Albania in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Based on the UN estimates, about 117 million women and girls are “missing” in China and India, which corresponds to 8% of the total female population. Moreover, 171 thousand little girls, who were never born in eastern Europe and the Caucasus, add up to that number<sup>3</sup>.

Almost all countries involved in that phenomenon approved laws that prohibit prenatal ultrasounds to identify the unborn child’s sex, as well as sex associated abortions. Such laws are often not applied or easily and affordably gone around: in China an “underground” ultrasound costs a little more than two and a half Euros<sup>4</sup>. In Haryana state, in northern India (where only 879 girls are born for every 1,000 children), the “rate” for an illegal abortion is about 132 Euros<sup>5</sup>.

If no “external” changes occur, the sex ration at birth is substantially balanced: for every 100 girls, 102-106 boys are born<sup>6</sup>. However, in some countries such ratio is so unbalanced (up to 128 males for every 100 females in some regions in China) to cause serious disruption in the demography.

In fact, in many patriarchal societies having female children is regarded a misfortune. No coincidence, that a Confucian say goes like: “With a son you have a lineage, with ten daughters you have nothing”. Therefore, millions of girls “disappeared”, due to the only-child policy applied in China for nearly four decades: either aborted or killed at birth by their parents, who absolutely wanted a son. The same happened in other countries in southern Asia, where marrying a daughter implies a huge economic effort to pay the dowry to the future husband, as it could even ruin a family, if it is poor.

## China

According to the data of the NGO “Population Research Institute”, between 2000 and 2014 over 9 million and 615 thousand selective abortions were registered in the country, on average 641 thousand per year. More than 1,750 daily<sup>7</sup>. In China the male-female ratio at birth is 117.8 boys for every 100 girls. But the ratio is even more unbalanced in some provinces like Anhui (128.7), Fujian (125.6) or Hainan (125.5)<sup>8</sup>. As a result of such selection policies, it is estimated that in China there are about 33 million and 800 thousand men “too much” compared to the women of the same age, that are therefore forced to remain single<sup>9</sup>. In the future, the situation could even further worsen, since the projections of UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) suggest that by 2030 the number of *single* men will exceed that of women by 50-60% for many decades<sup>10</sup>.

1 <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2012/sex-selection.aspx>

2 Asian Center for Human Rights, “Female Infanticide Worldwide: The case for action by the UN Human Rights Council”, June 2016

3 Preventing gender-biased sex selection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2015, UNFPA, <http://bit.ly/1UrLKMN>

4 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11393782/China-and-gender-abortion-Government-policy-isnt-the-answer.html>

5 <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/02/02/the-unintended-consequences-of-a-crackdown-on-sex-selection-in-indias-most-gender-skewed-state/>

6 <http://www.unfpa.org/gender-biased-sex-selection>

7 <https://www.pop.org/content/sex-selective-abortion>

8 <http://www.unfpa.org/publications/sex-imbalances-birth>

9 <http://www.stopfemaleinfanticide.org/files/Femalefoeticideworldwide.pdf>

10 Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences and policy implications, 2012, UNFPA <http://bit.ly/1OHto6x>

It does not deal with just a “sentimental” issue, but with a problem that already today concerns many neighbouring countries: thousands of girls and women coming from Burma, Vietnam, Mongolia, Cambodia, Laos and North Korea are trafficked every year to China to meet the increasing “demand” of Chinese singles<sup>11</sup>.

## India

India is the country following China as for the highest rates of sex imbalance with an average, at birth, of 112 boys for every 100 girls. In ten years, the number of girls aged between zero and six decreased from 78 million and 830 thousand in 2001 to 75 million 840 thousand in 2011. According to the estimates of the statistic central office, about three million little girls and girls “disappeared”<sup>12</sup>.

This is a problem of big concern for institutions. *“Our distorted mentality led to such sex imbalance. We attached too much importance to male children, and the same is true for many women. For how long will we continue to look at girls as paraya dhan (property of others)?”*, asks the Indian premier Narendra Modi, who did not mince words to launch the campaign *“Save girl child, educate girl child”* in January 2015<sup>13</sup>.



*Photo: Francesco Cabras*

## Armenia, Azerbaijan e Georgia.

11 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226845.pdf>

12 <http://www.stopfemaleinfanticide.org/files/Femalefoeticideworldwide.pdf>

13 Asian Center for Human Rights, “Female Infanticide Worldwide: The case for action by the UN Human Rights Council”, June 2016



Azerbaijan is one of the country recording the highest abortion rates in the world (on average 2,3 every woman<sup>14</sup>), including sex-selective ones. According to the “Population Research Institute”, between 2000 and 2014, at least 105 thousand girls were aborted in the country, i.e. on average 7 thousand abortions per year<sup>15</sup>. Such situation led to an impressive demographic imbalance with 116 males for every 100 females at birth, and peaks up to 120 in some regions<sup>16</sup>.

Similar data are also recorded in Armenia, where according to the estimates of the Ministry of Health’s department for maternal and child health, every year about two thousand sex-selection abortions are registered, that involve girls<sup>17</sup>. A prudent estimate assumes that about 15 thousand female foetuses were aborted between 2000 and 2010. If that trend is not stopped, according to the calculations of UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), 93 thousand women will be missing in Armenia in 2060<sup>18</sup>.

In Georgia, as in all former countries of the Soviet Union, the sex rate imbalance started increasing from the Ussr’s separation: from a “physiological” level at the beginning of the 1990s to a ratio of di 111,8 males for every 100 females in 2012<sup>19</sup>.

### **Sex ratio at birth**

1. China - 115 males/100 females
2. Armenia -113 males/100 females
3. India - 112 males/100 females
4. Azerbaijan - 111 males/100 females
5. Vietnam - 111 males/100 females
6. Albania - 110 males/ 100 females
7. Georgia -108 males/100 females
8. South Korea - 107 males/100 females
9. Tunisia - 107 males/ 100 females
10. Nigeria - 106 males/ 100 females
11. Pakistan - 105 males/100 females

Source: Asian Centre for Human Rights

*Please note: if no “external” changes occur, the sex ratio at birth is substantially balanced: for every 100 girls, 102-106 boys are born*

14 <https://www.guttmacher.org/about/journals/ipsrh/2012/legal-abortion-levels-and-trends-womans-age-termination#2>

15 <https://www.pop.org/content/sex-selective-abortion>

16 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/09/sex-selective-abortions-worry-azerbaijanis-2013930757245318.html>

17 <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74246>

18 <http://eeca.unfpa.org/news/93000-women-be-missing-armenia-2060-if-high-pre-natal-sex-selection-rate-remains-unchanged>

19 [http://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender-biased%20sex%20selection\\_ENG\\_2015\\_pdf.pdf](http://eeca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender-biased%20sex%20selection_ENG_2015_pdf.pdf)



## Chapter 2 – Female Genital Mutilations

There is a “new entry” on the podium for Female genital mutilation – Fgm. Today there are about 200 million girls who have been victims of genital mutilation. About half of the women cut live in merely three countries: Egypt, Ethiopia and Indonesia. The Asian country is the “new entry” in this gloomy ranking, made by Unicef in a recent report which discusses all the data already known on the propagation of Female genital mutilation.

On the one hand, it is possible to observe a decrease on the global level for female genital mutilation in percentage terms. There was an evident decrease in countries such as Egypt (from 97% in 1985 to 70% in 2015), Burkina Faso (from 89% in 1980 to 58% in 2010), Kenya (from 41% in 1984 to 11% in 2014), Liberia (from 72% in 1983 to 31% in 2013)<sup>20</sup>. The absolute data, however, narrates a very different reality: a progressive increase in the number of girls who are “cut.”

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC\\_2016\\_brochure\\_final\\_UNICEF\\_SPREAD\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD(1).pdf)

The demographic increase in many African countries and the improvement of data collection in Indonesia have forced Unicef to adjust its data: there are 70 million women and girls “cut” in the world compared to what had been estimated in 2014<sup>21</sup>.

Kinanti Pinta Karana, spokeswoman for Unicef Indonesia, explained that 13,4 million Indonesian girls with less than 11 years of age (about half of the female population in this age strand) may have been victims of genital mutilation.<sup>22</sup> The spread of this practice is generally very high throughout the whole country, with the exception of certain provinces (Papua, East Nusa Tenggara and Bali). Whereas the area in the capital, Jakarta, (68,1%) falls within the ten provinces with the highest percentage of mutilated girls<sup>23</sup>.

On a global level, girls who are less than 14 and who have been victims of genital mutilation are about 33 million. The highest incidence among the youngest is found in Gambia (56% of under 14 girls are mutilated), in Mauritania (54%) and Indonesia, where about half of the girls under the age of 11 have been victims of this practice<sup>24</sup>.

In most cases, the operation is carried out before the girls turn 15. And “it does not entail any benefit for the women,” the World Health Organization declares<sup>25</sup>. In fact, it is an actual mutilation, traumatizing, painful (as it is almost always carried about with no anesthesia) and dangerous for the health of the girls who have to go through it. Both on the short term (for the risk of septicemia, infections, or excessive loss of blood) and on the medium and long term the operation can cause problems for the urinary system, cysts, infections, complications during pregnancy and delivery, with high risks also for the baby.

If we look at the phenomenon in absolute numbers, the world capital of female mutilation is Egypt with about 27.2 million victims estimated. In second place we have Ethiopia with 23,8 million victims. This data helps to identify a further element: female genital mutilation is not necessarily restricted to Islamism. In fact, already in 2006, the supreme council of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, with maximum theological authority, declared that female mutilation are not part of the sharia (the Islamic law).

The Ethiopian case – a country where the majority is Christian – “demonstrates that the practice of female genital mutilation can be across all forms of religion. In fact, it concerns 89% of Ethiopian Muslim women, 67% of catholic women, and 69% of those who follow other Christian religions”<sup>26</sup>.

However, the phenomenon of genital mutilation is not limited to countries in other Continents. Also in Europe there are hundreds of thousands of women and girls who have to put up with this practice (about 500 thousand) or who are at risk of undergoing it (180 thousand)<sup>27</sup>. The data however, is from 2012 and experts tend to be precarious when using them because of the different methodologies used to collect it in each country.<sup>28</sup>.

21 *ibidem*

22 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/02/06/fgm-indonesia-hits-alarms-level.html>

23 *ibidem*

24 [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC\\_2016\\_brochure\\_final\\_UNICEF\\_SPREAD\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD(1).pdf)

25 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

26 <http://www.corriere.it/reportages/cultura/2016/uncutproject/>

27 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0261+0+DOC+XML+V0//IT>

28 <http://sociale.corriere.it/mutilazioni-genitali-femminili-500-mila-vittime-in-europa-video-2/>



The journalist Emauela Zuccalà tried to use the data currently available for the European countries, and she created a multimedia map on the “UNCUT” web-doc. We are talking about 170 thousand victims estimated in the UK, 53 thousand in France, 42 thousand in Sweden, 35 thousand in Italy and 25 thousand in Germany<sup>29</sup>.

The phenomenon of genital mutilation has reached alarming levels, not excluding the United States, where approximately 513,000 women and girls have or are at risk of undergoing mutative surgery to their genitals. This is a figure which, according to a recent government report, has tripled since 1990 (approximately 168,000). This is an increase which has been influenced above all by migration of people from countries in which genital mutilation is common practice<sup>30</sup>.

Female genital mutilation are a global human rights problem which affects women and girls in all areas of the world. It is a practice which is split up into various forms: from the “simple” excision of the clitoris, to the devastating cut of the outer folds which involves also the closure of the vagina (vaginal obliteration) In all cases, Unicef warns, it is violation of the girls’ and women’s rights.”

Throughout the past thirty years many steps forward have been made to contrast this phenomenon. From 2008 to today, more than 15,000 communities and local districts in twenty countries have publicly declared their desire to abandon genital mutilation. In addition, five nations have passed a law which criminalizes this practice<sup>31</sup>.

In addition, also within the population the belief that this practice should end is growing. Among the girls and women of up to 49, 67% claims that they are against this practice. Also 63% of men opposes it, with the main peaks being in Togo (96%), Niger (91%), Tanzania, Kenya, Benin (89%), Burkina Faso (87%), Senegal (79%), Sudan (64%) and in Nigeria (62%).

However, this might not be enough. In many countries – mostly those in which the mutilation phenomenon is particularly widespread- there exists a very strong social consensus, male and female, for the practice of female genital mutilations. In Mali, Guinea and Sierra Leone, only 20% of women and girls oppose this practice. In Chad and Egypt this percentage is 36 and 38% respectively. In these countries, the data for men is also quite similar: only 18% of Mauritian men oppose fgm, 21% of Malians, 28% of Egyptians and 38% of Guineans<sup>32</sup>.

29 <http://www.corriere.it/reportages/cultura/2016/uncutproject/>

30 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/08/11/with-500000-female-genital-mutilation-survivors-or-at-risk-in-u-s-its-not-just-someone-elses-problem>

31 [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_90033.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_90033.html)

32 [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC\\_2016\\_brochure\\_final\\_UNICEF\\_SPREAD\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD(1).pdf)

**FGM: How many are the victims?****(%)**

|               | <u>Women (15 - 49 years)</u> | <u>girl child (0-14 years)</u> |
|---------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Guinea:       | 97                           | 46                             |
| Sierra Leone: | 90                           | 13                             |
| Egypt:        | 87                           | 14                             |
| Sudan:        | 87                           | 32                             |
| Eritrea:      | 83                           | 33                             |
| Burkina Faso: | 76                           | 13                             |
| Gambia:       | 75                           | 56                             |
| Etiopia:      | 74                           | 24                             |
| Mauritania:   | 69                           | 54                             |
| Nigeria       | 25                           | 17                             |
| Yemen         | 19                           | 15                             |

Source: Unicef

**FMG must be eliminated?****The opinion of men and women from 15 to 49 years****(in %)**

|               | Women | Men |
|---------------|-------|-----|
| Togo:         | 95    | 96  |
| Kenya:        | 93    | 89  |
| Burkina Faso: | 90    | 87  |
| Benin:        | 86    | 89  |
| Camerun:      | 84    | 85  |
| Niger:        | 82    | 91  |
| Sudan:        | 53    | 64  |
| Mauritania:   | 53    | 18  |
| Egypt:        | 38    | 28  |
| Ciad:         | 36    | 28  |
| Sierra Leone: | 23    | 40  |
| Mail:         | 20    | 21  |

Source: Unicef



### Chapter 3 Child Marriages

Every year, around 15 million girls get married before turning 18<sup>33</sup>. They are forced to abandon their play and their studies. They have to leave their parents' house to go and live with a stranger, who is often much older than they are. For example, in Mauritania and in Niger, more than half of the child brides between 15 and 19 years of age are married to a man who is 10 or more years older than they are<sup>34</sup>.

Today, around 720 million women get married before turning 18. More than one out of three (approximately 250 million) was under the age of 15 on the “special day.” Despite the progress made to contrast this phenomenon, if we don't intervene with more effective policies the number of child brides will continue growing in the following years reaching 950 million by 2030<sup>35</sup> and 1.2 billion by 2050<sup>36</sup>, half of whom will be in sub-Saharan countries.

The reasons why a family gives up its girls to marriage are many. On the one hand they plant their roots “in social and cultural norms linked both to gender prejudice and to social strategies part of subsistence economies”<sup>37</sup>, Unicef explains. In other words: giving up a girl to marriage as soon as possible means that there is one less “mouth to feed” in the family, seeing as girls are generally considered less “useful” and “productive” than boys.

33 <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2016/>

34 [http://data.unicef.org/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded\\_pdfs/corecode/Child-Marriage-Brochure-HR\\_164.pdf](http://data.unicef.org/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded_pdfs/corecode/Child-Marriage-Brochure-HR_164.pdf)

35 UNICEF “State of the world children - 2016”

36 <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>

37 <http://www.unicef.it/doc/4605/matrimoni-precoci-una-violazione-dei-diritti-umani.htm>



Getting married at such an early age involves a series of severe consequences for the girls' health and development. Child marriage almost inevitably involves school abandonment as well as early pregnancy, which is very dangerous both for the mother and for the child. Compared to older and more educated girls, child brides are more likely to suffer violence, abuse and exploitation<sup>38</sup>. The age difference between the girls and their partners which is often quite large, makes it impossible for the child brides to use condoms or any other type of contraception, exposing them to catching sexually transmitted diseases.

### **Child Marriage in crisis areas**

Today, Africa is the continent most affected by this phenomenon. Niger, the Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan, Guinea and Malawi are some of the countries where child marriage is most diffused. All of these have in common the fact that they are "*fragile states*," marked by war, humanitarian emergencies and extreme poverty. "During these humanitarian crisis the rate of child marriage increases, particularly for girls," a report from the coalition "Girls not Brides" (of which Terre des Hommes is part) reports.

A striking example of this is Somalia. For more than twenty years this country has been devastated by a ruthless civil war where the presence of the terrorist group Al Shabaab, linked to al-Qaeda has risen strongly. Women and children are the main victims of this conflict and they represent 43% of patients who have been hospitalized in Mogadiscio<sup>39</sup>.

Human Rights Watch has recorded between 2010 and 2011 various episodes of kidnapping by the islamist militants which have harmed many boys and girls: the former were forced to take up weapons and fight, whereas the latter were used as maids (camp cleaning, wood collection, cooking) but they were also raped and forced to marry the militants who had kidnapped them<sup>40</sup>. In the Shabaab bull's eye were girls between 11 and 20 years of age, who were kidnapped in school, in the streets and even in their own houses: those who try to oppose them are threatened or killed.

A woman from Mogadiscio explained that one day four militants from al-Shabaab went towards the kiosk that she ran with her 17 year old daughter, and one of them asked to marry her. The woman opposed to this proposal, "I protested, she is too young. But they threatened to slit her throat in front of her. So we closed the kiosk and we moved to Afgooye". In front of this generalized violent situation, girls and their families have a very low possibility of defending themselves.

### **Natural catastrophes, another risk factor**

War, drought, earthquake and other natural disasters are all phenomenon which cause an increase in the number of child marriages. Within these contexts, families (particularly the poorest ones) see in marriage an occasion to survive to the further impoverishment determined by circumstances. Whereas in other situations marriage is seen erroneously as an opportunity to protect girls from violence. Bangladesh is one of the countries with the highest rate of child marriage: 52% of girls get married before the age of 18 and 18% gets married before 15<sup>41</sup>. 2% of the child brides in the

38 <http://www.unicef.it/doc/4605/matrimoni-precoci-una-violazione-dei-diritti-umani.htm>

39 "No Place for Children Child Recruitment, Forced Marriage, and Attacks on Schools in Somalia", Human rights watch (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/02/20/no-place-children/child-recruitment-forced-marriage-and-attacks-schools-somalia>)

40 Ibidem

41 <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh/>

country are less than 11 years old<sup>42</sup>. Poverty which is spread out in this Asian country represents the main reasons which pushes parents to give up their girls to marriage. This poverty is exacerbated by the continuous river floods and erosion of terrain with further impoverishes the families.

“Each piece of land which my father bought and each house in which we lived would end up underwater because of the erosion of the river banks. For this reasons, my parents decided to give me up to marriage,” Sultana explains, who has been married since she was 14 and is now 16 and 7 months pregnant<sup>43</sup>. The link between the natural disasters and the child marriages is not direct. But these events undermine further the families’ precarious economic conditions, making marriage almost inevitable for the girls.

In this situation of additional impoverishment, many families think that their daughters represent a burden. “If there is a man willing to marry the girl, they don’t think about it too much – an ONG operator explains in his report on Human Rights Watch-. The families think that if they lose their house because of a flood they will have to leave and looking for a new husband would require a lot of time. Thus, also the price for dowry will tend to rise”<sup>44</sup>.

When hurricanes or cyclones arrive, the situation worsens even more. Anika, for example, pre-defined her 14 year-old daughter’s wedding a year after the Cyclone Aila had passed (2007) “due to economic difficulties,” which the family was facing after the destruction of their house. It has been estimated that 300 to 400 houses will be swept away.

### **Amongst Syrian refugees, Child Brides are on the rise**

Salma escaped from the war in Syria. She was just 13 years-old, playing outside of the tent where she lived in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, when her stepmother broke the news that would change her life forever: in two days’ time she would have to marry a 30 year-old man that she had never met before.

In tears, she tried to resist. “My stepmother slapped me, telling me that she had already given her word. She said that I would be dishonouring my family if I were to refuse”. For Salma, the marriage was but the start of a living hell, made up of abusive and violent acts perpetrated by not only the husband himself, but also by his cousin without anyone raising a finger to defend her. She was able to get a divorce, but her family had organised another marriage for her. Today, Salma is 16, and married to a man 20 years older than she is. She already has a boy of nine months and a pair of twins on the way. Even her new husband abuses her<sup>45</sup>.

Stories like that of Salma are unfortunately very common in the countries neighbouring Syria (Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan), where millions of people have found refuge from the war that broke out in 2011, yet still live in extremely poor conditions. The refugee camps are crowded and unsafe. For the women, the threat of being subject to sexual violence and abuse is very real. Those who choose to live in the cities do so having to struggle to pay for rent and deal with a very high cost of living. For all of them, finding regular work is nearly impossible. Following their escape and years of waiting, the families have exhausted all of their savings, and become more and more

42 Marry Before Your House is Swept Away Child Marriage in Bangladesh - HRW  
[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bangladesh0615\\_ForUpload\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bangladesh0615_ForUpload_0_0.pdf)

43 Marry Before Your House is Swept Away Child Marriage in Bangladesh - HRW  
[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bangladesh0615\\_ForUpload\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bangladesh0615_ForUpload_0_0.pdf)

44 *ibidem*

45 <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/child-marriage-rise-among-syrian-refugees>

impoverished, contributing to a variety of factors that push all too many parents to give up their young daughters as brides.

“I made the decision to give my young daughter away because I felt that we as a family had found ourselves in a very precarious and uncertain situation. We had absolutely no stability here (the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, *nda*). There are many men in the streets and near the school. So, as a father, I had to choose to either keep her with me until our situation could improve or give her away”, tells the father of Reem, 15<sup>46</sup>. These parents believe – often in good faith – that a marriage could protect their daughters (as well as the family’s honour) from the risk of being subject to violence from strangers. They do not realise that, on the contrary, their decision signs away their child’s future, forced to abandon their education and exposed to the threats of violence from the new family, as well as pregnancies whilst they are still only children.

There are also those who decide to give up their daughters for economic reasons. After the wedding, it will be the husband’s responsibility to take care of his young, new wife by feeding her and providing her with a roof above her head, and dowries can be like a breath of fresh air that allow the family to continue to survive for another few months.



## A Movie against Early Marriage in Jordan

Amneh and Ahmad have three children. The father works as a guard in a security company and earns little more than two hundred euros per month with it being very difficult to make the money last the month. When their daughter, Sara, was just 15 years-old they decided to give her away to a 28 year-old man. Yet, the marriage did not go well. After three years Sara decided to file for divorce due to abuse inflicted on her by her husband. With the help of her mother she is raising her son and dreams to enter university thanks to the help of her parents and the small amount of money she manages to earn working in a food production scheme, a role that has been created by SFWS, one of Terre des Hommes' partners in Zarqa, Jordan. This local association is striving to involve the local people and institutions in an attempt to reduce rates of child marriages and alternatively provide opportunities in both education and work, contributing massively to the Indifesa campaign. Under the observation of the Canadian Embassy, SFWS and Terre des Hommes have pushed on with a project aiming at raising awareness in Jordanian and Syrian families that child weddings are a violation of human rights. To do it, 20 women (10 Syrian refugees and 10 Jordanians) were encouraged to tell their own stories of being child brides through the creation of a film<sup>47</sup> that was then screened in 13 cities across 7 different Jordanian governorates with the help of 6 international NGO's.



In Jordan, Terre des Hommes alongside local partners have established a centre in which specialists in the respective fields of gynaecology and paediatrics have set up a clinic. The workers there have reported many cases of domestic violence towards young brides, who are especially at risk due to the amount they must depend on their husbands economically. The doctors have further observed how these girls become completely isolated from their original family and friends and how they end up suffering from both social and psychological isolation. This also has negative implications for what regards the possibility of calling on family planning and gynaecological consultancy health services, which are particularly important for girls as young as these that are at more risk than adult

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yauFrczoJk>

women of complications during child birth. According to Jordanian law, the legal age of marriage is 18, however it is possible to request special permission from the juvenile court to get married at the age of 15. This permission is often acquired without great difficulty and widely depends on the personal interpretation of the judges themselves.

**Amalia Mendes**, project manager at Terre des Hommes

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### **Combatting the source of the problem**

Before the war, the amount of child weddings in Syria was relatively low: amongst girls between the ages of 20 and 25, just 13% had gotten married before the age of 18 (2011), a phenomenon that was most widespread in the country's most rural regions. Today, however, the phenomenon of child weddings has become more and more widespread, affecting thousands of girls in Syria including both those forced to flee abroad, and those that have stayed put in Syria. Although official statistics do not exist, some studies help to throw a disturbing and dramatic light on the scale of this phenomenon.

Data provided by the Islamic Justice Department of Amman (Jordan), for example, reveals how child weddings represent 35% of all weddings registered by Syrian refugees in 2015. However, considering the fact that many marriages are not in fact registered, the rate of this phenomenon is most definitely much higher<sup>48</sup>. And the trend has seen a continuous growth from the 12% registered in 2011 to the 25% of 2013, and the 35% of today<sup>49</sup>.

A very similar situation has also been found in Lebanon, that has taken in more than a million Syrian refugees. Even here there are not comprehensive figures, but a study conducted by the faculty of political sciences in "Saint Joseph" university (Beirut) helps to further understanding of how bad the situation really is. Of the 101,771 women from marriages registered by UNCHR in Lebanon, not much less than 23 thousand were under the age of 18 on the day they married (equal to 22.58%). Whilst amongst girls between the ages of 12 and 17 present in Lebanon today, 4,454 girls have already married (equal to 6.3% of the total<sup>50</sup>). Meanwhile in Turkey, Syrian girls represent 33% of the 181,000 child brides counted in the country<sup>51</sup>. A report from Save the Children has also highlighted how child brides are also on the increase in the Syrian refugee camps found in Erbil (Iraq) and Egypt<sup>52</sup>.

Child weddings are a huge violation against the rights of the girls. There are, however, a series of factors that are further detrimental to the girls, putting them at even higher risk. Firstly, the often large age gap between the girls and their husbands. A Unicef study surveying refugees in Jordan found that in 16.2% of cases the husband was at least 15 years older than the bride. In 31.8% of cases the husband was between 10 and 14 years older. Whilst in 37.2% of cases the age gap was measured at between 5 and 9 years<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, refugee families do not have access to the court or religious institutions that allow them to register their marriages, something that is essential to guarantee protection to the young brides. This precarious situation also has an impact on the

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/child-marriage-rise-among-syrian-refugees>

<sup>49</sup> [http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE\\_Child-marriage-in-emergencies\\_2015.pdf](http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_Child-marriage-in-emergencies_2015.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.sciences-po.usj.edu.lb/pdf/FinalIII%20June%2029%20Images%20Hi%20res.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/12/10/almost-one-third-of-marriages-in-turkey-involve-child-brides-says-womens-advocate/>

<sup>52</sup> "Too young to wed", Save the Children, 2014

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF, A study on early marriage in Jordan 2014

children born from these marriages that, in turn, are not able to be registered at the registry office, and do not have access to basic services and facilities<sup>54</sup>. Moreover, in many Arab countries, it is the father who transmits citizenship to the child and a situation of irregularities exposes these children to the risk of becoming stateless.

The war also disrupts family ties and networks that, in normal circumstances, would permit the family of the bride to verify the “reputation” of her future husband as well as his economic situation. For the displaced and the refugees, however, this is impossible. Family ties are broken and the families are forced to accept marriage proposals of men unknown to them (often from other countries) and endowments that are less than that of other girls. In Jordan, for example, a marriage costs the family of the groom an average of 21,000 dollars, but Syrian girls “cost little”, with endowments costing around 400 and 700 dollars. This is a situation that, alongside the becoming ever more common practice of “temporary marriages” fuels the fires of sexual exploitation and trafficking of young Syrian girls.

### **Arrival in Europe**

Some of these child brides have even arrived in Europe. In 2015, the Norwegian Department of Immigration identified ten girls under the age of 16 (the minimum age of consent and marriage in Norway) married to men older than themselves. Of these, four had already had a child. It is likely that these numbers are actually much higher, since it is impossible to calculate how many have declared that they were adults without being such<sup>55</sup>.

Upon arrival, these girls were left together with their husbands, within the shelters for immigrants, convinced that this would be the least “traumatic” solution for them. “These girls find themselves in a very difficult situation. They have had to leave their own country, family, and friends. Their partner is the only person that they know and trust in Norway”, explains Heidi Vibeke Pedersen, immigration agency official in Reuters. Protests from Norwegian associations for the protection of the children’s rights have pushed the agency to revise its own policy and separate the child brides from their husbands, as well as beginning to review all suspicious cases.

The problem has also emerged in other European countries. In February 2016, the Danish immigration minister, Inger Støjberg, declared that he wanted to “block the sheltering of child brides in the refugee centres” following the review of a dozen cases. Whilst in Sweden, after a journalistic inquest, it was declared by authorities that at least 70 child brides had been taken into the country’s sheltering centres.

In the Netherlands, on the other hand, in 2015 there were at least twenty girls between the ages of 13 to 15 that had been identified (the country’s current minimum age of marriage). The disappearance from a shelter centre of a 14 year-old Syrian during her ninth month of pregnancy has only blown up the situation. “At the moment we have a problem of those between the ages of 15 and 18 – explains the minister of immigration, Klaas Dijkhoff. We want to be more strict, and in the future we will be. We will not recognise these relationships<sup>56</sup>.”

<sup>54</sup> “To protect her honor. Child marriage in emergencies – the fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence” - CARE

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-brides-idUSKCN0XI1MZ>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34573825>

## Temporary marriages, from brides to prostitutes

Some weddings are designed to last a few days, or a few weeks, after the dowry payment. When the period agreed between the groom and the bride's family terminates, the marriage ends without there being any obligations from any of the two sides.

This practice is called *mut'ah*, widespread in some Arab countries, and it can be considered a form of sexual abuse, similar to prostitution. "A serious violation of children's rights," Ecpat declares,<sup>57</sup> which permanently marks the lives of the girls involved: after being abandoned by their "temporary" husband, arranging a new "respectable" wedding is almost impossible. Thus these girls are sentenced to a life of social exclusion and marginalization and can only aspire to other temporary weddings. Hence, masked prostitution. "Child marriage become a trafficking channel of people, work exploitation, prostitution," denounces Ecpat.

This practice has different names in various Arab countries (from Iran to Afghanistan, from Bangladesh to Egypt) but not only, also in India and Pakistan are marked by this phenomenon. Misyar ("the traveller's wedding") is widespread especially in areas with a high presence of tourists, for instance, Egypt. Here rich men coming from countries facing the Persian gulf spend short periods of holidays (usually a few weeks) where they "temporarily" marry young Egyptian girls. This marriage has a temporary pre-fixed bond which dissolves as soon as the groom returns to his country of origin, free of any ties or obligations towards his "wife." Nothing is due to these girls, other than the dowry's price, not even in the case of a pregnancy.

Many associations denounce how these weddings represent "one of the most common forms of trade in Egypt"<sup>58</sup>. A research conducted in 2010 by the "National council for childhood and maternity" identified that 81% of foreign "grooms" were from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Jordan.

The situation became even more complex in the last months of 2015. In fact, the government published a decree which obliges foreign men to pay a dowry (50,000 Egyptian Pounds, worth 6,380 dollars) if the age difference with the bride exceeds 25 years. A decision which set off the protests of the main associations for human rights protection, according to whom this decision legalizes this form of trade and hence the exploiting of the poorest girls, strengthening a type of business which hunts down the poorest and most vulnerable.

A decision which affected girls like Hindi, who was forced to marry a 59 year old with Saudi Origins. The marriage lasted only two months, the duration of his travel. The groom paid around 2000 dollars to Hindi's father for this temporary wedding. Following the father's pressures (despite the mother's protests" Hindi accepted the wedding: she knows that her family needs the money to live and medicines. Soon, however, she realizes she made a mistake. I was disgusted by this man who was older than my father: "I was an innocent girl, who believed in marriage and in love," she explains. "Now I hate the only word: marriage"<sup>59</sup>.

57 "Unrecognised Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Child, Early and Forced Marriage", Expat - Plan, Ottobre 2015 (<http://www.ecpat.org/news/new-thematic-report-unrecognised-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-children-child-early-and-forced/>)

58 <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/summer-industry-egyptian-brides-gulf-visitors>

59 <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/02/01/463708687/does-egypts-law-protect-short-term-brides-or-formalize-trafficking>





## Chapter 4 - Early Pregnancies

It is a short step from baby bride to baby mama. It is estimated that each year about 16 million girls aged 15 -19 give birth to a child; we must add the one million children under the age of 15 who give birth to that figure. In 95% of cases, these are girls and young women living in low- and middle-income countries<sup>60</sup> do not have access to family planning services and counseling. Three million are girls under the age of 20 are forced to have abortions in countries where this practice is illegal or insecure<sup>61</sup>.

But there are also other elements that may result in increased teenage pregnancy among adolescents (with all the subsequent discrimination against young people), such as epidemics like Ebola. Between March 2014 and the end of 2015, Sierra Leone has had to deal with this epidemic. Many measures were taken by that country's government to reduce the spread of the disease, including the decision to close schools from June 2014 to April 2015. During this period - notes Amnesty International – there was an increase in teenage pregnancy, due in good part to the absence of protection from sexual violence. "The quarantine and a squeezed health care system have made it impossible for many girls to obtain sexual and reproductive health services avoid early and

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/>

<sup>61</sup> UNFPA "Girlhood, not motherhood", [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Girlhood not motherhood final web.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Girlhood_not_motherhood_final_web.pdf)

unwanted pregnancies,” stated the Amnesty report. “The Minister of Education, Science and Technology has admitted that during the Ebola crisis, teen pregnancy has increased<sup>62</sup>.” Girls have been victims twice over. In addition to violence and unwanted pregnancy, they were also forced to leave school in April 2015. The Minister of Education, Science and Technology said that pregnant pupils would not be allowed to attend school to protect “innocent girls” from negative influences. According to government estimates, about 3 thousand girls were removed from school and were prevented from taking the end-of-year exams while the local experts estimate the figure to around 10,000<sup>63</sup>.

## #OrangeRevolution - The strength of Girls



Photo: (c)Benedicte Desrus

### **Maria Fernanda Pineda Calero**

"We women will never stop feeling inferior because men control us. They will never let us live our lives." Maria Fernanda Pineda Calero is just 17 but is fully aware of the weight of the strong macho culture in her country, Nicaragua. Not afraid to call herself a feminist, in addition to study engineering, she promotes a program ("Born to fly") that teaches girls about their sexual and reproductive rights and their right to citizenship.

This isn't easy in Nicaragua, a small country in Central America, where girls and women face serious discrimination. The law prohibits abortion in all cases, even when the mother is a victim of rape. And sexual violence in the country is widespread: in 2013 alone, at least 6,069 cases of violence were recorded and the main victims (88% of cases) are girls<sup>64</sup>. As a result, Nicaragua has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Latin America: 28% of teenagers give birth to a child before the age of 18.

For Maria, the objective is the fight against the *machista* culture that dominates Nicaragua, which places men above women. This culture is transmitted by the families and the school: girls are

<sup>62</sup> [Sierra Leone: Shamed and Blamed: Pregnant Girls' rights at risk in Sierra Leone](http://www.amnesty.it/Sierra-Leone-alunne-incinte-escluse-dalla-scuola-e-dagli-esami)

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.amnesty.it/Sierra-Leone-alunne-incinte-escluse-dalla-scuola-e-dagli-esami>

<sup>63</sup> <https://plan-international.org/news/2015-08-04-nicaragua-latin-americas-teen-pregnancy-capital>

<sup>64</sup> <https://plan-international.org/news/2015-08-04-nicaragua-latin-americas-teen-pregnancy-capital>



merely required "to have children and to be subservient, submissive and weak." Women in Nicaragua are simple "caregivers" in a society that considers them "objects of pleasure for men." She reaches her peers in the small rural community of the Esteli region through the "*Nací para Volar*" ("Born to fly") program. She has spent time with them, talking about those issues that no one discusses at school or at home. She explains to the other girls what their sexual and reproductive health rights and their rights as citizens are.

For Maria, promoting sex education projects is the only way to provide the knowledge needed to have full rights over her own body. "The sexual health is important for the empowerment of women who must be free to make decisions about their own bodies. We women must not allow men to manipulate us, control us or enslave us," she explains. "As women, we must all agree on this. We have to be in agreement that we want to control our mind, our body and whether to have children. " In 2015, "*Nací para Volar*" included 84 girls and has recently expanded its activities, mainly to rural areas of the country where teenage pregnancy (in girls as young as 13-14 years old) is more widespread. Spreading information and raising awareness about their rights is a key element to offering the possibility of a better life for many girls. "Now, for me, having a boyfriend is not a priority. Having someone to lean on is not a priority," says Maria. "Sometimes I wonder how many children I would have by now if I had not attended training seminars in the past. I probably would have children by now."



*Photo: (c)STL KEREM YUCEL*

## Chapter 5 - Girls Migrants in Europe

We are facing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. During 2015, 65 million, 300 thousand people had to flee because of wars, persecutions, general conditions of violence or human rights violations<sup>65</sup>. But only a fraction of these people has journeyed to Europe: asylum applications recorded in the Old World in 2015 were just over one million.

Most of these refugees (over 850 thousand) arrived in Europe after crossing the strait that separates Turkey from Greece<sup>66</sup>. From there, they began the dangerous and difficult route along the so-called "Balkan Route:" Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia. Their goal: to reach Germany or Sweden to seek asylum. Most are Syrians (49% of arrivals in Greece), Afghans (20%), Iraqis (8%) and Eritreans (4%).

Many women (16% of the total) and children (24%) cross the Balkan Route. A trip during which refugees often suffer violence at the hands of traffickers and police forces are deployed to patrol the borders between the various countries<sup>67</sup>.

It is virtually impossible to get precise numbers, making it possible to figure out how many girls travelled the Balkan Route. The extreme mobility of refugees and their short stays in shelters make it impractical to accurately collect data. For example, Serbian police have registered 8,600 unaccompanied minors between May and November 2015, 24% of which were girls<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR, "Global trends 2015" <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> UnWomen, "Gender assessment of the refugee and migration crisis in Serbia and FYR Macedonia", 2016

<http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/country/serbia/gender%20assessment%20of%20the%20refugee%20and%20migration%20crisis%20in%20serbia.pdf?v=1&d=20160112T163308>

<sup>67</sup> Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis, UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> UnWomen, "Gender assessment of the refugee and migration crisis in Serbia and FYR Macedonia", 2016

<http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/country/serbia/gender%20assessment%20of%20the%20refugee%20and%20migration%20crisis%20in%20serbia.pdf?v=1&d=20160112T163308>



What is clear is that women and children are particularly vulnerable. "Women traveling alone or with children, pregnant women, nursing mothers with young children, adolescent girls, unaccompanied minors, child brides - sometimes with a child in her arms already - people with disabilities and the elderly are among the groups most at risk. They require effective and coordinated protection," states a recent UNHCR report<sup>69</sup>. Interventions that, UN Women highlights, don't happen: "The needs, requirements and protection necessities are not addressed in full" writes Ingibjorg Gisladdottir, regional director for Europe and Central Asia at UN Women<sup>70</sup>.

Migrants are easy prey for traffickers, who try in every way to extort money from them to pass from one border to the next. For women and girls, there is a real risk of being the victims of rape or violence or forced into prostitution. This is what happened to Oumo, a young woman born in sub-Saharan Africa and on the run from the war. Her goal is to reach Germany, but during her passage through Greece, she was forced to "sell herself:" the first time was to get a false passport, the second for boat passage to Turkey. "I had no choice," explains Oumo. Once she arrived on a Greek island, she was forced to sleep outside in the port for two nights with no privacy and no security. She wasn't able to register with the local authorities. "I thought I was going crazy," she confesses<sup>71</sup>. In this situation, women and girls often do not have access to basic sexual and reproductive health services. There is a lack of services, time (the migrants stop as little as possible, they aim to reach their destination as soon as possible) and female interpreters with whom they can speak without fear.

The lack of information leads migrants to rely on traffickers, offering passage to Northern Europe for a high price. Once again, women and girls are paying the highest price. "They are needlessly exposed to multiple forms of violence and exploitation by these criminals. If they all had the information necessary to understand the various stages of their journey, migrants would end up being less subject to traffickers' threats."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis, UNHCR, January 2016 <http://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/1/women-migrants-and-refugees-in-serbia-and-fyr-macedonia#sthash.0bXLCLXZ.dpuf>

<sup>71</sup> Protection risks for women and girls in the European refugee and migrant crisis, UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/569f8f419.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> "No Safety for Refugee Women on the European Route: Report from the Balkans", Women's refugee commission, January 2016

## #OrangeRevolution Stories

### Yusra Mardini

In the summer of 2015, Yusra left war-torn Syria with his family. She fled from Damascus, and after a first stop in Beirut, reached Izmir, a city on the Turkish coast where thousands of refugees were boarding small boats to reach the Greek islands. But after just twenty minutes at sea, the boat Yusra and twenty others were traveling on stopped. Panic started to spread on board. The boat could have tipped over and many people who could not swim could have died in the small stretch of sea separating Turkey and Greece.

Yusra is just 18 years old but she doesn't think: she jumps in the water, immediately followed by her sister and another person. They use all their strength to push the boat until they arrive ashore. Twenty passengers are safe: **"I thought it would be a shame if I drowned."**

Right because Yusra Mardini isn't just any girl. She is a young swimming champion who was able hold on to her dreams despite all her difficulties. **"The war was tough. Sometimes we could not train, because of the fighting. Other times we could but there was a bomb in the pool,"** she says. Yusra experienced the war, her escape from her country, her dangerous journey across the Aegean and her laborious ascent, border after border, across the Balkans until she arrived in Germany.

She couldn't resist the call of the water: less than a year after her trip in the Aegean, Yusra is back in the pool to train, in Berlin. This time, she doesn't have to fight for her life, but compete in the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro under the banner of the International Olympic Committee, which, for the first time, created a team of eight athletes-refugees.

**"I want to be an example for people. When you have a problem, there is no point sitting and crying. I want to show everyone that it is hard to achieve their dreams, but not impossible. You can do it, everybody can do it, every athlete can do it."**



*Photo: © 2016 International Olympic Committee*

### Unaccompanied foreign minors

In 2015, just under 90,000 unaccompanied minors were registered in Europe<sup>73</sup>: children and teenagers fleeing from Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq and many other nations in crisis. Children and young people traveling alone, without the support of parents, older siblings or other family members. In almost all cases, these are males. According to Eurostat estimates, there were 7,805 girls who traveled alone to Europe who recorded their arrival in 2015<sup>74</sup>.

In Sweden, more than 35,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in 2015, 2,847 of them were girls<sup>75</sup>. In Germany, just over 1,200 girls were registered<sup>76</sup>. In Italy, however, in 2015, just 130 girls arrived. Overall, in our country, according to the data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, there are about 12 thousand unaccompanied minors at the welcome centers (as of 31 May 2016): just 599 were girls<sup>77</sup>.

**Table: Unaccompanied children and migrant girl asylum seekers in Europe**

|                                      | 2014 | 2015 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>European Union (28 countries)</b> | 3210 | 7805 |
| Belgium                              | 140  | 225  |
| Bulgaria                             | 30   | 110  |
| Czech Republic                       | 0    | 5    |
| Denmark                              | 95   | 215  |
| Germany                              | 595  | 1255 |
| Estonia                              | 0    | 0    |
| Ireland                              | 10   | 5    |
| Greece                               | 35   | 55   |
| Spain                                | 0    | 5    |
| France                               | 95   | 95   |
| Croatia                              | 0    | 0    |
| Italy                                | 50   | 130  |
| Cyprus                               | 15   | 40   |
| Latvia                               | //   | 0    |
| Lithuania                            | 0    | 0    |
| Luxembourg                           | 5    | 5    |
| Hungary                              | 15   | 1270 |
| Malta                                | 5    | 0    |
| Netherlands                          | 170  | 675  |
| Austria                              | 95   | 395  |
| Poland                               | 85   | 65   |
| Portugal                             | 10   | 15   |
| Romania                              | 5    | 5    |
| Slovenia - 0                         | 0    | 0    |
| Slovakia                             | 0    | 0    |
| Finland                              | 160  | 130  |
| Sweden                               | 1360 | 2935 |
| United Kingdom                       | 230  | 275  |
| Iceland                              | 0    | 0    |
| Lietchtenstein                       | //   | 0    |
| Norway                               | 130  | 375  |

<sup>73</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7244677/3-02052016-AP-EN.pdf/19cfd8d1-330b-4080-8ff3-72ac7b7b67f6>

<sup>74</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyunaa&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyunaa&lang=en)

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/09/seeking-refuge/unaccompanied-children-sweden>

<sup>76</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyunaa&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyunaa&lang=en)

<sup>77</sup> idem.



|             |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|
| Switzerland | 140  | 345  |
| TOTAL       | 3210 | 7805 |

## **Girls migrants, support from Terre des Hommes to reconstruct their fragmented identity**



*Photo: Karl Mancini*

Fatima, Faith, Joy, Amina... Their names tell the multiplicity of their origins: Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, Senegal, Eritrea, Somalia, etc. They arrived in Sicily after a long journey during which they suffered violence and abuse, which is why unaccompanied foreign minors need specific attention and psychological support immediately after landing, given their particular vulnerability in their countries of origin as well as during their migratory journey and upon their arrival in Italy. With the Lighthouse project, Terre des Hommes tries to reduce vulnerability as soon as possible and provides the first psychological and social support during the urgent first welcome meeting.

Since January 2016, a quarter of psychological interventions by the Ragusa team at the Pozzallo hotspot and the welcome center involved minor migrants.

The stories told by these girls are similar given the recurring fragility of the economic-social-familial fabric in their country of origin, their experiences of psychological distress and their similar ways of expressing it.

Often, they come from lower-class families; they report having been forced to interrupt their studies because of a lack of economic means. Their stories tell of a loss of one or both parents and being cared for by extended family, repeated incidents of physical and sexual violence at home and out of the home in their country of origin. This often results in unwanted pregnancies and forced abortions, feelings of guilt and psychological suffering that persist over time.



Minors, however, are active people, who often emigrate with a desire to continue their studies, find a job in Italy to send money to their family of origin and reunite with a relative; they have defined migration plans and specific resources.

Their stories frequently have gaps and their stories appear fragmented and incomplete. During the migratory journey, children are exposed to physical and sexual violence in the prison camps in Libya managed by traffickers (Beni Walid, Sabha, Sabratha) and exploitation on the trafficking circuit. They appear reluctant to speak of the repeated violence to which they were exposed in the country of origin and during their journey. That violence often makes them more susceptible to further exploitation upon their arrival in Italy. The "wounds of the soul," the psychological trauma resulting from them, impact their bodies. Post-traumatic symptoms such as generalized body aches, headache, spatiotemporal disorientation, feelings of sadness and apathy, irritability, insomnia and loss of appetite emerge; they highlight feelings of shame and guilt and a sense of identity fragmentation that characterizes their way in the world as well as anxiety disorders and depression. Their bodies speak when their words do not allow us to express the absurdity of the inhuman violence perpetrated by human beings.

I remember the behavior of a minor from sub-Saharan Africa, who claimed not to have suffered violence during the journey as she tried, in vain, to obsessively clean her skin, wiping it with excessive force. She claimed that her skin "was dirty, different than before." Feelings of guilt and impurity, a loss of sense of self, which requires space for psychological processing to be shared and integrated to enable recovery of one's identity as a person and a woman worthy of value.

The welcome activities for all unaccompanied minors at the centers with which Terre des Hommes works, and psychosocial activities aimed at a first integration of minors (geographical orientation workshops, literacy courses in Italian, etc.) are crucial to help with the vulnerability of migrant children. The same is true for the observation of informal dynamics within these contexts, which allows us to pick-up on the non-verbal behaviors that highlight vulnerability in children. The psychological support aimed at getting the children's history and providing a first ear empathetic to their suffering, supporting them with personal and social resources. Later, Terre des Hommes reports vulnerable situations in psychological reports sent to the competent authorities (and WHO specifically for victims of trafficking) in order to request their transfer and request continued psychological care at the welcome facilities. Sharing stories with minors within the limits of the quick transfers is an important first step towards providing care. This is also true for the transmission of psychological vulnerability reports, which, following the minor in her journey inside the host system, can help avoid further fragmentation. Maintaining an attitude of respect for the child's time - you need to develop a relationship of trust, which is difficult given their experience with violence - and the truth that words cannot tell is crucial in a psychological journey that aims to support them in reestablishing their dignity as people.

**Marianna Cento**, psychotherapist and field coordinator for the Terre des Hommes' Lighthouse Project in Ragusa

## ***“The House of ARSIS”***

### **A shelter for the temporary hospitality of children and adolescents at risk**



Poverty, social inequality, discrimination, the humanitarian crisis Greece is facing in the present is affecting a large part of the population – domestic and foreign- resulting on a situation of risk, exploitation and abuse of children, who end up being marginalized and excluded in contrast to what is provided, ensured and guaranteed by the national law and international conventions.

Since the previous summer plethora of refugees and migrants used to arrive to the Greek islands and to move ahead to Europe through the Balkan route. Adults and minors, boys and girls, men and women, old and invalid people were “traveling” accompanied by many and different risks. For some months they were just moving ahead being impossible to detect the vulnerable cases. It was impossible for victims of abuse or exploitation to stop around for asking help too. We set up a Balkan mechanism for the vulnerable unaccompanied minors between Greece – FYROM – Serbia where a close collaboration was developed and many unaccompanied were benefited.

After the partially border closure in January and after the strict one in March in we came face to face with the risks of the refugees Idomeni; abuse, domestic violence, sexual and labour exploitation, trafficking, drug selling, etc. ARSIS was there with different outreach teams and in collaboration with national agencies and international organizations with main target the creation of structures and programs that can support minors and vulnerable social groups in various aspects of their lives. So, one of them is “The House of ARSIS” in Thessaloniki where boys from 5-12 years old and girls up to 18 years old are sheltered.

“The House of ARSIS” was established in 2007 in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Social Solidarity and the National Centre for Social Solidarity. It is a shelter for the temporary accommodation of children and adolescents at risk. It can host up to 23 children victims of abuse, neglect, trafficking and exploitation, unaccompanied minors. Its main aim is to meet the immediate need for the accommodation of a child, take over all of his daily care for as long as needed and to provide the necessary time to the relevant authorities to explore and find the most appropriate solution for the permanent care of the child.

The majority of the children and adolescents sheltered were children on the move, in most cases they were found unaccompanied and victims of exploitation and trafficking. From 250 cases we managed 98 unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Republic

of Ghana, Lebanon, Palestine, Mali for whom we facilitated their family reunification process. Also, we have supported many children from Albania, Bulgaria, Romania that were found begging in the streets of Thessaloniki, minor girls from Somalia, Hungary, Albania, Mali, Eritrea, Greece victims of trafficking and almost in all cases we supported children victims of physical punishment, abuse and neglect.

We achieved to protect teen girls (16 and 17 y.o.) from Syria and Afghanistan which were victim of sexually abuse by family members or being raped by groups of young men or victims of force marriage. But there were and there are boys raped every night from other adult refugees too but they never testify it. Many cases, but we can't identify the victims and/or their perpetrators in the majority of them. We have to strength the protection mechanism and to give them the security they need.

By **Marianna Kolovou** –Director of the shelter, and Terre des Hommes' partner

## **Two ARSIS beneficiaries' stories**

**Fatima** is a 16-year-old Afghan girl. She left Iran 2 years ago, to avoid staying married to an older man, against her will. Her mother and brother helped her escape, despite the danger. She didn't have enough money for the travel to Europe, so she stayed in Turkey for two years, where she worked illegally in various jobs (factories, hair dressing salon, mini market, storages). In Turkey she met smugglers who promised to help her go to Sweden, where her mother's sister lives, for free. She was convinced and she followed the five men. One of them raped her. She crossed the borders and was given to another man. They were registered together as a family, and were transferred to a camp in Athens. There, Fatima revealed the truth about the man and the fact that they are not related, without saying anything else though, and was transferred to a shelter for unaccompanied minors in Athens. She faced many problems in the shelter and wanted to leave. She found an Afghan family, which was heading to Idomeni and left with them. She stayed in Idomeni for 3 months. She approached an NGO and asked for help, but still without revealing the whole truth. When she came to The House of ARSIS she was tired and devastated. Her hands and legs were covered by scars created from self-harm. It was only after two months that she found the courage to tell us how many times she was raped and for how many days she was kept in a tent forced to sleep with men. We still do not know how she escaped. Today she has already applied for family reunification, she speaks Greek and has English lessons, she does not harm herself anymore and has no suicidal thoughts.

**Jenny** is a 21-year-old young woman from Hungary. Today, she is a mother of a newborn, happily married to a 25-year-old man from Albania and lives in Athens. When Jenny was 8 years old her parents got divorced and the father won the custody. Despite the mother's many efforts and accusations against the father, for sexual abuse, the girl kept on living with him. The mother had problems with drugs and alcohol and was forbidden to have any contact with the child. When Jenny was 12 years old, went to the police and revealed the truth about her father. The father, who sexually abused her since the age of 6 was imprisoned and Jenny was placed in a foster family. After a year and many problematic situations with the foster family, she was transferred to a shelter in Hungary, where she stayed until she was 16. At that time, she met a young man and fell in love. He persuaded her to leave the shelter and follow him. The shelter lost her track and she was reported missing. The young man told her that, in order to avoid the police, they could go to Greece and have their vacation. She was brought to a Greek island and was sold to traffickers for a 1000 euro. One woman and four man kept her and two adult women drugged in a house, where they were forced to sleep with 10 to 15 men per day. After three months the traffickers forced Jenny to contact, through social media a 15-year-old girl who lived in the same shelter in Hungary, and persuaded her to come as well. The other girl came accompanied by a young man, who pretended to be Jenny's boyfriend. The trafficking circuit was active for about 10 months, then it was discovered by the police with the help of a doctor, who although had examined the girls, had never any other contact with them, as he claimed. Jenny was transferred in a shelter for abused women, although the 15-year-old girl was returned to Hungary. Jenny was kept in Greece in order to testify in the court. She came to The House of ARSIS when she was almost 17. The minor made three suicide attempts, she harmed herself every day, she was receiving medication for depression and was monitored regularly by a psychiatrist and psychologist. Despite her effort and the staff's effort, Jenny could not stand the idea of living in a shelter. After 7 months she left and went to Athens. She came back for about two months and then she left again. She still keeps contact.





*Photo: Andrea Frazzetta*

## **Chapter 6 – Victims of trafficking**

### **Nigeria: girls forced into prostitution**

They arrive on barges coming from Libya, together with refugees fleeing Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Gambia. Unfortunately the journey to Europe is not a choice for them: they were forced or deceived to get onboard, after travelling weeks or months in the desert, to be then forced into prostitution on the streets all over Italy.

According to the data of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in 2014, 1454 Nigerian women landed in Italy (in 2013 they were 433). In 2015 that figure skyrocketed reaching 5633, i.e. almost four times higher. During the first months of 2016, the number has continued to increase: between January and May, 1692 Nigerian women arrived in Italy, i.e. more than double, compared to the same period last year (738). The IOM, the International Organization for Migration, believes that the majority of women are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation: “Alone or under the control of mysterious husbands, fiancées, sisters or real female pimps – the so called *madames* – the

migrants arrive in increasingly larger groups, thus confirming the suspicion that the irregular migration route is now also a major route for human trafficking<sup>78</sup>. The IOM detected also a “significant increase in the minors, who are victims of human trafficking”, but gathering precise data is very difficult. “The number is growing, but it is difficult to quantify how many girls are underage. Moreover, many of them claim to be over 18, although it is not true”, explains Flavio Di Giacomo, spokesman of IOM.

Furthermore, about 300 Nigerian minors, who arrived by sea and were intercepted by the Italian protection system in 2015, add up to those women (the year before they were 196). Even though the official data do not specify how many of them are girls, the number of children and girls is “absolutely significant and we believe, that the number of trafficking victims is quite high in the group”<sup>79</sup>. On average, the girls trafficked to Italy and then into prostitution are very young, due to the very nature of the exploitation purposes. That is confirmed, for example, by the case of 66 Nigerian women, who in 2015 were brought to the Cie (identification and expulsion centre) of Ponte Galeria in Rome. “Only few were over 25. All the other ones were between 18 and 20, that is little older than teenagers”, according to the preface of the report “Interrotte” (Interrupted), edited by the association BeFree of Roma<sup>80</sup>.

The phenomenon is reflected in the reports and by the experience on the field of the street units operators active in different regions of Italy. Vincenzo Castelli, president of the association “On the Road”, estimates that 10% of the young Nigerians on the roads are underage<sup>81</sup>. Much like the estimate made by the operators of the association “Papa Giovanni XXIII”. “We operate in the area of Bologna and Ferrara. The Nigerian prostitutes, that we meet are on average increasingly younger, their age ranging between 19 and 25. Understanding how many are underage is very difficult, it could be about 10%”, explains Laila Simonelli. She is also concerned because “many of those girls were raped and abused before arriving. Not only in Libya, where almost all women are abused and harassed, but also in their country of origin”<sup>82</sup>.

### **The enticement in Nigeria**

The trafficker’s ideal preys are the poorest and less educated girls. The majority of young victims of trafficking come from Edo State, a region in South Nigeria, where the phenomenon is so widespread, that, according to some estimates, at least one family out of ten in the capital, Benin City, allegedly has a daughter, sister or cousin involved<sup>83</sup>. Nigerian sister Monica Chikwe, from the association “Slaves no more”, emphasizes that it is no coincidence that in recent years traffickers go seeking for their preys in villages, farther and farther away from the capital<sup>84</sup>.

The promise of a job in Europe (like beautician, hairdresser or baby-sitter) is very attractive for girls living in widespread poverty conditions. They are even aured the possibility to obtain a scholarship or the mirage of a career as a fashion model. In other cases, the families themselves sell their daughters to traffickers or encourage them to leave, hoping to improve their economic conditions. However, some girls are aware that they will have to prostitute themselves, but underestimate the exploiting conditions and abuses they will be facing, confident that they will be able to repay the

78 <http://www.italy.iom.int/images/pdf/RapportoAntitratta.pdf>

79 Piccoli schiavi invisibili (Small invisible slaves), 2015– Save the Children -

[http://images.savethechildren.it/IT/f/img\\_pubblicazioni/img273\\_b.pdf?\\_ga=1.51787753.1772370527.1466159955](http://images.savethechildren.it/IT/f/img_pubblicazioni/img273_b.pdf?_ga=1.51787753.1772370527.1466159955)

80 “Interrotte. Storie di tratta, percorsi di resistenze”, (Interrupted. Histories of trafficking, resistance routes), association BeFree, Roma, 2016

81 Telephone interview

82 Telephone interview

83 <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/easo-country-origin-information-report-nigeria-%E2%80%93-sex-trafficking-women>

84 [http://www.altreconomia.it/site/fr\\_contenuto\\_detail.php?intId=5406&fromCatDet=79](http://www.altreconomia.it/site/fr_contenuto_detail.php?intId=5406&fromCatDet=79)

debt in a few years<sup>85</sup>.

All must swear blind obedience to the *maman* during a voodoo ritual (with the related threats of “divine” punishments in case of rebellion or flight). They swear to repay the debt incurred into to pay for the journey: 20, 30 and up to 50 thousand Euros.

The most popular route winds through Niger and Libya and the time to cover it varies: from two weeks up to about a month. During this time the Nigerian girls “change hands” several times. The stay in Libya is one of the most painful part of the journey: the young Nigerian girls are kept in the so called *connection houses* waiting to leave for Europe. There they are raped, tortured, seized and arrested. “It deals with traumatic experiences, often organized or tolerated by the exploiters, that are aimed at weakening the victims resistance and *bend them psychologically and physically* in view of a long exploitation period”<sup>86</sup>.

Furthermore, the cruelty and brutality of the traffickers seem to be back to the levels of more than 10 years ago. IOM reports “a barbarisation of the subjugation methods and an increase in the violence and abuses against the victims (...). The victims have less freedom compared to the past and develop a renewed feeling of real terror of the traffickers”.

85 <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/easo-country-origin-information-report-nigeria-%E2%80%93-sex-trafficking-women>

86 <http://www.italy.iom.int/images/pdf/RapportoAntitratta.pdf>



## The invisible crime: human trafficking in Peru



Yessica is 14 years old and is the third-to-the youngest of a large family that lives in the Andes. She and her siblings witnessed the aggressiveness of their father, constantly drunk, against their mother for years. What's more, the money in the house was always a small amount, and it was spent on alcohol, barely managing to fill the stomachs of all the family members. Yessica suffered deeply in this situation; she was shy, listless and always sad. For some time now, girls like Yessica have been disappearing from this area and then reappear in so-called "postribar" in Madre de Dios, a Peruvian Amazon district where there are many gold mines and therefore hundreds of miners willing to spend their meager earnings for the "company" of the young chambermaids working in such areas. To pay them, with the mirage of a well-paid job and the promise of proceeding with their studies, traffickers go from village to vilage, very skilled at identifying the most vulnerable adolescents, who have already suffered some kind of violence, those who come from broken families, have compelling economic needs or find themselves in a situation of abandonment.

Once they enter the racket, the girls are subjected to severe control and often remain prisoners on the premises, vexed with ill-treatment and other forms of violence to subdue their resistance. Their identity cards are taken from them to be used as instruments of blackmail and control.

Human trafficking is the economic exploitation of people against their will. It is not an improvised phenomenon, but a well-organized business, with well-defined rules and procedures to ensure a turnover whose value is second only to the trafficking of drugs and weapons. Reliable estimates of the *Global Slavery Index* indicate that victims of trafficking— captured by force or threats or enticed by devious schemes – likely amounts to more than 35 million human beings worldwide. Women and girls represent 70% of all the victims, with a shocking increase in the number of children:



"Globally, children now account for about one third of all identified trafficking victims, says the "Global Report on Human Trafficking". Two out of three are female"<sup>87</sup>.

In Peru trafficking has taken a its toll on at least 66,000 victims. Data of the Peruvian judicial authorities show that in 2014 one third of the victims were girls under 17 years, most of whom ended up in prostitution, since they were easier to deceive and subjugate than adult women.

Often it occurs that to entering into contact with potential victims, the traffickers use hiring agencies, radio commercials or newspaper ads offering jobs that do not require special training and offer above-average salaries.

With increasing frequency we are seeing that there are traffickers who go from village to village in rural areas with false promises of work or study. Many teenagers, deluded by the hope of a better future, end up accepting these proposals, as uncertain as they appear to be. Immediately after the "capture" the victims are sent away from their area of origin and placed in nightclubs, hotels and bars that operate at the edge of the law; these establishments are submitted to very few regulatory controls in the city but often in the many mining camps in the Andean areas and Peruvian rain-forest.

The consequences for the victims of trafficking are dramatic: psychological disorders, often irreversible, in addition to serious physical consequences and the often insurmountable difficulties freeing themselves of the traumatic memories and succeeding in rebuilding a normal life. Despite the prevalence and horrific nature of this phenomenon, it is almost always invisible to the eyes of citizens and institutions that do little to counteract it.

Terre des Hommes decided many years ago to fight against this phenomenon and concretely help adolescents and young women who are victims of trafficking. In Peru the actions are on three levels. A preventive level with projects in rural Andean communities where the potential victims come from. The goal is to raise awareness of the phenomenon and its dangers by communicating with the families and adolescents who are potentially at risk. The actions are designed to strengthen self-esteem, education, provide opportunities for personal development, strengthen family relationships, occasions for social participation, so that the children and adolescents can exercise their rights in a community environment that does not exclude them or suggest that they emigrate or, worse, make them fall victim to unscrupulous traffickers. In terms of assistance to the victims, with funds raised through the Indifesa campaign, Terre des Hommes supports the 'welcome back home' managed by the Yanapanakusun Center of Cusco, where teenager victims of exploitation, abuse and trafficking are assisted in the following ways: through promoting resilient processes to allowing the girls to reorganize and rebuild a new life plan, recover lost identity and sensitivity, identify the positive opportunities that life offers. Finally, through the dissemination of useful information for a better understanding of the problem so these adolescents are less likely to be deceived, we promote, along with various institutions, the national campaign "*No te dejes engañar*" (*Do not be fooled*).

**Mauro Morbello, Country representative of Terre des Hommes Italy in Peru**



## Chapter 7 – Girls in Conflict

### Iraq, the war on women's bodies.

For more than ten years there has been no peace for Iraqi women and girls<sup>88</sup>. First the US invasion of Iraq (2003), then the sectarian violence of the two-year period 2006-2007 that claimed thousands of victims. Finally, the Isis militiamen's conquest of many cities exacerbated the violence against girls and women, especially those belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. "Isis has established and legitimized the practice of sexual slavery at an unprecedented level," the report says *"No place to turn"*<sup>89</sup>.

According to Yanar Mohammed, President of the *"Women's Freedom"* Organization in Iraq, these practices represent something more than just a war tactic: "The Isis militiamen are restoring methods used 1200 years ago and they declare it openly: slavery in Islam is acceptable, as well as taking women by force from other tribes<sup>90</sup>", women and girls (often very young) belonging to the Yazidi, Turkmen and Christian minorities.

A document circulated in November 2014 on some social media linked to the Islamic State terrorist group even goes so far as to develop a downright "rape theology", legitimizing slavery and sexual violence to the damage of "non-believers", regardless of whether the girls have reached puberty or

88 From 2003 to present some human rights associations estimate about 14,000 women and girls were killed while 5,000 -10,000 were abducted or fell into the hands of traffickers

89 <http://www.minorityrights.org/13017/reports/ceasefire-report-no-place-to-turn.pdf>

90 <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ceasefire-report-no-place-to-turn.pdf>

not. As slaves and reduced to mere ownership by the combatants, they can be "purchased, sold or given as a gift"<sup>91</sup>.

The evidence collected in recent months<sup>92</sup> has allowed us to understand how this system of violence and abuse is organized. Girls and young women are separated from the men and the older women. The "war booty" is then moved several times to various locations scattered between Syria and Iraq to be made available to Isis militiamen. Syrians and Iraqis first and foremost, but also Libyans, Algerians, Palestinians, Saudis and even Europeans.

It is impossible to identify an exact number of how many women and girls are caliphate prisoners. A United Nations' report published in March 2015 estimated that about 3,000 women (especially Yazide) are still captive<sup>93</sup>. But the number could be much higher. In September 2014 a group of Yazidi activists made available to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) a database with the names of 3,133 women abducted or killed by Isis. About six months later, in March 2015, names on the list had grown to 5,324<sup>94</sup>.

Jalila was only 12 years old when she was kidnapped by Isis militiamen in August 2014 together with seven other members of her family. The young girl, her sister, her sister-in-law and niece still in diapers were immediately separated from the older members of the family. Following further moves to other cities between Iraq and Syria, Jamila lost all contact with her family and was taken to a big house with other girls and Yazide women: "The men arrived and we were chosen by them. We were told to get up and they examined our bodies, they asked us to show them our hair and beat the girls who refused", the young Yazidi girl said in the HRW report.

Jalila tried to oppose the violence of the man who had "chosen" her: "I begged him to let me go and take me back to my mother." It was no use. For three days the girl suffered rape and violence by her persecutor before being handed over to seven other Isis fighters. Four of them raped her on several occasions. "Sometimes I was sold, other times I was donated", she remembers. The last man who possessed me was particularly violent"<sup>95</sup>.

The purchase-sale and trafficking of human beings (especially girls and young women) is one of the main sources of income for the coffers of the Islamic State terrorist group. According to UNAMI (United Nations Iraq), ISIS allegedly opened an office in Mosul, a real market where "women and girls are shown with price tags, so that buyers can choose and negotiate the sale"<sup>96</sup>. Similar situations have been reported in Ramadi, Fallujah, but also in the Syrian cities of Aleppo, Raqqa and al-Hasakhan.

A booming market, thanks to new technologies. The girls, in fact, are also apparently sold through the exchange of messages via WhatsApp and Instagram: "Virgin. Pretty, 12 years old. Her price reached \$12,500. She will be sold soon", "reads the text of a message published in July 2016 by the Associated Press agency in an structured investigation on this issue"<sup>97</sup>.

91 Ibidem

92 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/14/iraq-isis-escapees-describe-systematic-rape>

93 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50369#.V4OPSY4uJ71>

94 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/14/iraq-isis-escapees-describe-systematic-rape>

95 Ibidem

96 *Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq*, Unami, 2014, pg. 15  
<http://bit.ly/1rGSQhK>

97 <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/bc71decfae2f4fee8196a20515b4c5fc/islamic-state-tightens-grip-captives-held-sex-slaves>





## THE INTERVENTIONS OF TERRE DES HOMMES IN 2015



### IRAQI KURDISTAN

**What we do:** **HUMANITARIAN AID** to Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs, **PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT** to children in temporary child-friendly spaces (Case del Sole-Houses of Sun)

**Where:** Basirma, Erbil, Markum, Harshim

**Beneficiaries 2014-2016:** 19,470

**Situation\*:** 246,859 Syrian refugees, 927,936 Iraqi IDPs

### LEBANON

**What we do:** **EDUCATION, PSYCHOSOCIAL ASSISTANCE, HUMANITARIAN AID** aimed at Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian child refugees and their families

**Where:** Arsaal, Jdeideh, Mount Lebanon, Beqaa Valley, and Palestinina refugees camps in Naher al Bared, Ein el Helweh and Rashiyeh

**Beneficiaries 2012-16:** 564,828

**Situation\*:** 1,048,275 Syrian refugees



### SYRIA

**What we do:** **PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND PROTECTION** to children, adolescents and women, **HUMANITARIAN AID** (food, infant milk, sanitary kits, clothing)

**Where:** Tartous, Aleppo, Latakia, Al Sweida, Idleb, Ariha, Jsr-Ash-Shugur, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama

**Beneficiaries 2012-16:** 531,900

**Situation\*:** 270,000 people have died in the conflict, 6 MILLIONS CHILDREN in need of aid; more than 4.8 MILLIONS refugees in neighbouring countries, more than 50% of which are children

### JORDAN

**What we do:** **MATERNAL-CHILD HEALTH CARE, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT** to children, girls and mothers refugees

**Where:** Zarqa

**Beneficiaries 2015-16:** 22,588

**Situation\*:** 651,114 Syrian refugees, 54,586 Iraqi refugees



\*Source: UNHCR, May 2016



## **A Future After Boko Haram**

Amina was only 17 years old when she was kidnapped by Boko Haram militants. It was the night between April 14-15, 2014, when a group of armed men broke into the girls' high school Chibok in northeast Nigeria, taking away 276 students. Just over two years later, Amina returned to freedom: in May 2016, the girl was found by a group of armed vigilantes a few kilometers from the border of Cameroon. In her arms, she had the barely four-month old daughter.

In the hours and days immediately following the kidnapping of Chibok, 57 girls managed to escape their captors<sup>98</sup>, but more than 200 are still imprisoned. Amina was the first among the Chibok girls to be officially released and was able to reunite with his mother. Her story has become a symbolic case: Nigerian President Buhari promised the young women "the best medical and psychological care that the Nigerian government has to offer. And everything she needs to reintegrate better into society."<sup>99</sup>

Even though this story has a happy ending, there are hundreds of others that tell a very different tale. The abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls and the enormous resonance of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign have pushed the Nigerian Government to intensify operations against the Boko Haram militants. This has allowed several hundred women and girls caught in other raids to be returned to freedom. But for them, the return home is very difficult.

## **Baby Brides and Baby Fighters**

"Most (of the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram) have been targeted because they were female students, because they were Christian or both<sup>100</sup>" states a Human Rights Watch report. The leader of the Islamist group *Abubakar Shekau* himself explains why schools, especially girls' schools, are among the terrorist group's prime targets some years. "Western education is a sin; it is prohibited. Women should only think about marriage." Marriage and - of course - children.

The youth who escaped Boko Haram tell of their months or years spent in captivity as modern-day slavery within fields hidden amongst the dense equatorial forest. They cannot study. Christian girls are forced to convert and each must marry a Boko Haram fighter. There are also cases where girls are used in military operations, transporting ammunition or serving as unwitting suicide bombers to strike crowded places like markets or the areas around police stations.

## **A Difficult Homecoming**

Kidnapped, forced through threats or violence to marry their captors, abused and exploited. The nightmare of the young Boko Haram captives does not end with their return to freedom. They experience prejudice that only serves to re-victimize them: in the eyes of their families and clans, they are "impure." In some cases, a few even consider them dangerous.

The fear is that the girls who escaped or were freed by Boko Haram may seek to radicalize other community members. In addition, children born from rapes are viewed with particular suspicion because they are "contaminated" by the "bad blood" of their biological fathers.

"Many people see these women and their children as a threat. They fear they have been indoctrinated. The recent increase in suicide bombings carried out by women, including minors, in Nigeria, has reinforced the conviction that women and girls who come in contact with Boko Haram (by force or voluntarily) contribute to the region's insecurity," the report claims. Even their children are seen as a potential threat: "They think that they will become the next generation of terrorists."<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/18/africa/nigeria-chibok-girl-found/>

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36328583>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/27/those-terrible-weeks-their-camp/boko-haram-violence-against-women-and-girls>

<sup>101</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/Nigeria\\_BadBlood\\_EN\\_2016.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/Nigeria_BadBlood_EN_2016.pdf)

## Child Soldiers

"There were always the guerrillas in my village. I had seen them a few times and decided to join." Angelina is now 23 years old. She joined the FARC (the Colombian Marxist rebels, at war with the federal government for the last fifty years, editor's note) out of desperation when she was just 15 years old. "At home, things were going badly. So bad that I had lost the will to live. I thought that if I joined an armed group, I might die."<sup>102</sup>

Fortunately, Angelina managed to survive. But her years in the forest with the rebels and on the battlefield left deep scars. On her body and beyond. Scars that did not go away easily. "The first time I went to battle, I was very scared because I couldn't handle a gun. I often wanted to cry and I prayed to God to give me the strength to go forward. It's not a nice place for kids and even adults." When she looks back, Angelina does so with regret: "I will not go back. I want to get on with my life. The years I spent there (with the guerrillas, editor's note) was wasted time."<sup>103</sup>

It's hard to get accurate numbers on how many girls fought with FARC. Some data, however, helps us understand the size of the phenomenon: since 1999, about six thousand children have fled from the Colombian guerrilla groups or were released by the military after capture to obtain State protection. About 30% are girls<sup>104</sup>. In the last three years, about 870 adolescents were freed, a third of whom were female<sup>105</sup>. Their numbers are reducing thanks to the peace process with each passing day.

Life for girls in the Colombian forests is very tough. They work behind the lines and fight on the front lines, just like the men and boys. Some fall in love; others are victims of violence and abuse by fellow soldiers and superiors. Many, when they become pregnant, are forced to have abortions or are separated from their children who are given to other families. Thanks to agreements signed between the Colombian government and FARC (mediated by UNICEF), hundreds of children and teenagers under 15 have laid down their arms and have left the guerrillas without fear of repercussions. Agreements to demilitarize teenagers under the age of 18 are still pending.

## Where Armed Children Are Fighting

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of child soldiers has not been monitored globally for several years. So there are no reliable estimates of how many baby fighters have been recruited by armies or by rebel groups in various countries now affected by conflict.

The Secretary General's Annual "Children and Conflict" Report to the United Nations includes the armed forces in seven countries as well as 49 armed groups that recruit minors. The map of child soldiers includes countries like Iraq and Syria (where the proliferation of armed groups, including ISIS, has made children even more vulnerable), Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, Colombia and Myanmar<sup>106</sup>.

In some cases, boys and girls are abducted or recruited by force by regular armies and rebel groups. In other cases, however, the young end up with a gun in their hand due to poverty, social exclusion or a desire for revenge because of the violence their family has suffered. "In all cases, the recruitment of children for military purposes and their use by armed or military forces is a violation of their rights," underlines UNICEF<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>102</sup> Unicef Colombia, "Childhood in the Time of War: Will the children of Colombia know peace at last?", March 2016, [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF\\_Colombia\\_Child\\_Alert2\(2\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF_Colombia_Child_Alert2(2).pdf)

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem

<sup>104</sup> Ibidem

<sup>105</sup> ICBF, *Programa especializado para la atención a niños, niñas y adolescentes desvinculados de grupos armados ilegales*, January 2016

<sup>106</sup> [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/162&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/162&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC).

<sup>107</sup> Unicef UK, "Ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict"

Despite significant progress over the past two decades, tens of thousands of children (boys and girls) are still forced to take up arms.

In the Central African Republic, between 6-10 thousand children have been recruited by armed groups during the crisis: in 2014, 2,800 children were freed, including 646 girls<sup>108</sup>. The "Lord's Resistance Army" (a rebel group active between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo) have recruited more than 30 thousand children: 1 in 4 are girls<sup>109</sup>. The young fighters are asked to perform the same tasks as their male comrades: cleaning and domestic work in the camps, transportation of ammunition and messages, shifts as guards and couriers. But they also fight on the front line. Girls are often victims of rapes and violence; they are forced into prostitution or to marry their fellow soldiers.

### **Overcoming Prejudices**

The most difficult challenge that former child soldiers face is overcoming prejudices. *"Social inclusion programs are particularly important for girls, who may have left the ranks of fighters bypassing the formal demobilization programs. And they then risk being excluded from reintegration programs,"* states a UNICEF<sup>110</sup> report, which shows how former fighters address particular difficulties in returning home. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo *"when children are released or manage to escape from armed groups, girls are often left behind."* Girls and young women suffer more acutely the stigma of their previous collaboration with the armed forces or groups. This is even more true if they have been the victims of rape and gave birth to the children of guerrillas.



<sup>108</sup> Ibidem

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/11/tales-uganda-female-child-soldiers-151130115418168.html>

<sup>110</sup> Unicef UK, *"Ending the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict"*





*Photo: Andrea Frazzetta*

## **Chapter 8 – AIDS: A Girls’ Epidemic**

Reducing new HIV infections to less than 500 thousand a year until 2020 and reducing the number of AIDS-related deaths to 500 thousand every year: these ambitious objectives have been set by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which aims to defeat the pandemic by 2030. This goal represents the culmination of a slow and difficult process, but it has resulted in a series of important results over the last 15 years, such as the reduction of maternal and perinatal infections. New infections among children decreased from 290 thousand in 2010 to 150 thousand in 2015<sup>111</sup>.

However, a number of categories did not see these improvements: prostitutes, for example, intravenous drug users and adolescents, especially girls<sup>112</sup>.

Every week, about 7 thousand girls between 15-24 years of age become HIV-positive<sup>113</sup>. Around the world, girls make up 65% of new infections among adolescents. In the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (where 70% of people are living with HIV), girls represent three new HIV infections out of four<sup>114</sup> (2015).

Although in Italy and in Europe there is, in general, less and less discussion about AIDS and its risks, the disease continues to kill: AIDS, in fact, is the leading cause of death among teenagers in Africa and the second in the world<sup>115</sup>. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of victims between 15

<sup>111</sup> Unaid, “Prevention gap report,” 2016 - [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/2016-prevention-gap-report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2016-prevention-gap-report_en.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> Idem.

<sup>113</sup> [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/150410\\_Fleischman\\_HIVAdolescentGirls\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/150410_Fleischman_HIVAdolescentGirls_Web.pdf)

<sup>114</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_91908.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_91908.html)

<sup>115</sup> Unicef, “Children and Aids”, 2016



and 19 years old has increased more than tenfold. Although rates of new infections among adolescents have stabilized, UNICEF fears that they may increase again in coming years, which would mean a general increase in the number of infections<sup>116</sup>.

One of the causes that determine the spread of the infection is the fact that many young men and women do not know they have contracted HIV. They do not take the test for fear of having to face the social stigma that would result from the fact of being ill: during 2015, in fact, only 13% of girls and 9% of boys underwent adequate testing<sup>117</sup>.

### **Contagion, Girls at Risk**

What are the causes of this "overexposure" of girls to the risk of contracting HIV and developing AIDS? In part, there are biological reasons (increased susceptibility to infection) but mainly it comes down to social and economic factors. Poverty, early marriage, poor education, lack of opportunities and jobs that offer a possibility of a different life, sexual abuse and marriages with much older men (therefore unable to negotiate the use of contraceptives) are all factors that exponentially increase the risk for girls of contracting the HIV virus.

A poor girl is more likely to be forced into prostitution, even occasionally, to survive. A girl who must travel kilometers on foot every day to get firewood or water or to go to school are at risk of being subject to aggression and violence. A baby bride married to an older man, who is perhaps already married, has a greater chance of contracting the virus. For her, it is almost impossible to convince her partner to protect her by using a condom. A girl who cannot read or write does not know who to turn to protect her health. And when her life is turned upside down by war, the risk of violence increases exponentially.

Also girls encounter a number of difficulties in accessing information required to avoid infection, information services for sexual health, condoms (in sub-Saharan Africa, there are only 50% of the amount necessary). For those with a "physical" barrier (the distance from small villages), in many contexts, there are also "regulatory" barriers. In many situations, accessing health protection and health services requires the authorization of parents or legal guardians," according to the UNAIDS report. "This precludes people from information and services they need to protect their health."

We must also consider the high rates of domestic violence in many countries. Fear of their partners discourages many women, especially girls, from turning to sexual health services. Many do not even know they have HIV so they cannot be treated. Without appropriate interventions, they will then transmit the disease to their children.

In addition to being more exposed to the risk of contagion, in short, girls also have more difficulties accessing those services that can advise and help them prevent contraction. And they do not know this disease: only 26% of girls living in sub-Saharan Africa countries have a "complete knowledge" about the risks linked to HIV (compared to 33% of their male peers)<sup>118</sup>.

### **Focusing on Girls to Defeat AIDS**

To defeat AIDS by 2030, UNAIDS, among its priorities ("The five pillars"), has indicated the prevention of infection among girls, with the ambitious goal of reducing cases among the youngest (15-24 years) by 100 thousand units per year by 2020. This goal can be achieved as long as a series of targeted and integrated interventions is implemented, especially those involving their partners.

First, we must focus on sex education in order to provide children and young people with the information they need to choose consciously and protect their health. Second, UNAIDS has

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.unicef.it/doc/6925/aids-dal-2000-raddoppiati-decessi-tra-adolescenti.htm>

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>118</sup> Unaid, "Prevention gap report" 2016 - [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/2016-prevention-gap-report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2016-prevention-gap-report_en.pdf)

underscored another piece: strengthening legislation against domestic violence and developing programs to protect women victims of domestic violence.

Third: schools. Ensuring girls have the opportunity to finish secondary school (including through economic contributions) will reduce the number of new infections: in fact, education allows young people to make informed choices to protect their health. Several surveys show that the most educated girls (those who have spent at least six years at school) are better able to protect themselves against HIV and other diseases<sup>119</sup>.

<sup>119</sup> Goal: promote gender equality and empower women. In: UNICEF—Millennium Development Goals [website]. New York: UNICEF ([http://www.unicef.org/mdg/index\\_genderequality.htm](http://www.unicef.org/mdg/index_genderequality.htm), accessed 6 July 2016)



*Photo: Giulio Di Sturco*

## **Chapter 10 Violence against Girls**

For millions of girls, violence is part of their everyday life: at home, at the hands of their fathers, other relatives or partners; at school where they suffer abuses by teachers or peers; in factories or in homes where they work as domestic servants where they suffer beatings and abuse by their employers.

The most common form of physical violence children and adolescents suffer is the type waged against them to get respect and discipline from parents and other caregivers. It is estimated that worldwide almost 2 out of 3 girls ages 10 to 14 are regularly subject to corporal punishment<sup>120</sup>. Between the ages of 15 and 19, it is estimated that about 70 million girls have been victims of some form of physical violence<sup>121</sup>. The consequences of this situation are tragic: every 10 minutes, somewhere in the world, a girl dies as a result of some form of violence. A UNICEF survey estimates that violence is the second leading cause of death among girls aged 10 to 19: there were, in fact, 54 thousand young victims (2012), mainly in Southern Asia (30,000 deaths), in Southeast African (5,800), East Asia and the Pacific (5,400) and Central Western Africa (5100)<sup>122</sup>.

Not even school is a safe place for young girls and teens. This is a particularly serious problem if you think that school and education are the main tools to change the fate of girls, to give them a real

<sup>120</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/A\\_Statistical\\_Snapshot\\_of\\_Violence\\_Against\\_Adolescent\\_Girls.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/A_Statistical_Snapshot_of_Violence_Against_Adolescent_Girls.pdf)

<sup>121</sup>

[http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Hidden\\_in\\_plain\\_sight\\_statistical\\_analysis\\_Summary\\_EN\\_2\\_Sept\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Hidden_in_plain_sight_statistical_analysis_Summary_EN_2_Sept_2014.pdf)

<sup>122</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/A\\_Statistical\\_Snapshot\\_of\\_Violence\\_Against\\_Adolescent\\_Girls.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/A_Statistical_Snapshot_of_Violence_Against_Adolescent_Girls.pdf)

possibility of change. "Widespread gender violence seriously undermines the goal of providing all children with a quality, just and inclusive education."<sup>123</sup>

A recent report by Ungei (United Nation's Girls' Education Initiative) and UNESCO estimates that 246 million children suffer violence at school each year. This includes various forms of violence: the inability to use the bathrooms or bathrooms safe from sexual abuse (one girl out of four did not have the option). Males and females suffer violence differently, "but girls are at a much greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation"<sup>124</sup>.

There are no specific studies on this phenomenon, but some studies carried out locally present a partial - but worrisome – picture of the abuse at high schools. In Cameroon, 30% of sexual violence against girls was committed by older students. Sometimes, teachers are the abusers: in the Ivory Coast, 47% of teachers admitted to having sexual relations with female students. Research conducted in South Africa, however, revealed that 8% of secondary school students suffered serious sexual assaults or rape last year while at school<sup>125</sup>.

The United Nations estimates that worldwide about 120 million girls have suffered forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. In most cases, the perpetrators of this violence are husbands, partners, boyfriends or exes<sup>126</sup>.

### **Italy, Violence is (also) peer-to-peer**

Some of girls' worst enemies are just boys, who are often friends or acquaintances. In Italy, according to the Ministry of Justice,<sup>127</sup> among those under the charge of the Social Services Offices for Minors as of August 31, 2016, 817 males (599 Italian and 218 foreign) have been convicted of sexual assault. 130 have performed sex acts with minors that are classified as a crime (26 were foreigners), while 267 (including 16 foreigners) were accused of being involved with child pornography and child prostitution. The numbers are impressive and leave no room for doubt: preventing violence against children must be a priority of public institutions and requires the commitment of all so teenagers and children can grow up with healthy examples of respectful relationships. On this point, there is still much to do, as evidenced by the next chapter of this Report.

The Inter-Agency for Crime-Related Data provides a different, but certainly not more comforting perspective, on crimes against children. This report was developed specifically for Terre des Hommes. We wanted to look at a five-year period (2011-2015) to analyze changes in the various types of crime, starting from the first year where, with our *Unprotected Country* campaign, we wanted to turn the spotlight on the unacceptable number of children and adolescent victims and the prevalence of the females amongst them. In 2011, there were a total of 4,946 (61% girls and teenage girls), while, in 2015, the number rose to 5,080, a 3% increase. Compared to the previous year, 2014, the *annus horribilis*, in which there was the highest number of child victims since 2004 (5,356, 60% female), we saw a 5% decrease, which we hope will be the sign of an effective police program to combat such phenomena like child prostitution (-13% over the last 5 years) and not just different, more hidden, sexual exploitation of minors that is harder to detect.

Certainly the most worrying aspect is child pornography: the number of victims grew exponentially from 2011 to 2015, reaching +543%. 81% of them were girls and teenage girls. This signals that this is certainly one of the areas of minor exploitation with the highest market demand so we need to increase efforts to combat it.

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/232107E.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

<sup>127</sup> [http://www.giustiziaminorile.it/statistica/dati\\_statistici/DatiAggiornati/dati\\_aggiornati\\_2016.pdf](http://www.giustiziaminorile.it/statistica/dati_statistici/DatiAggiornati/dati_aggiornati_2016.pdf) - Table 5

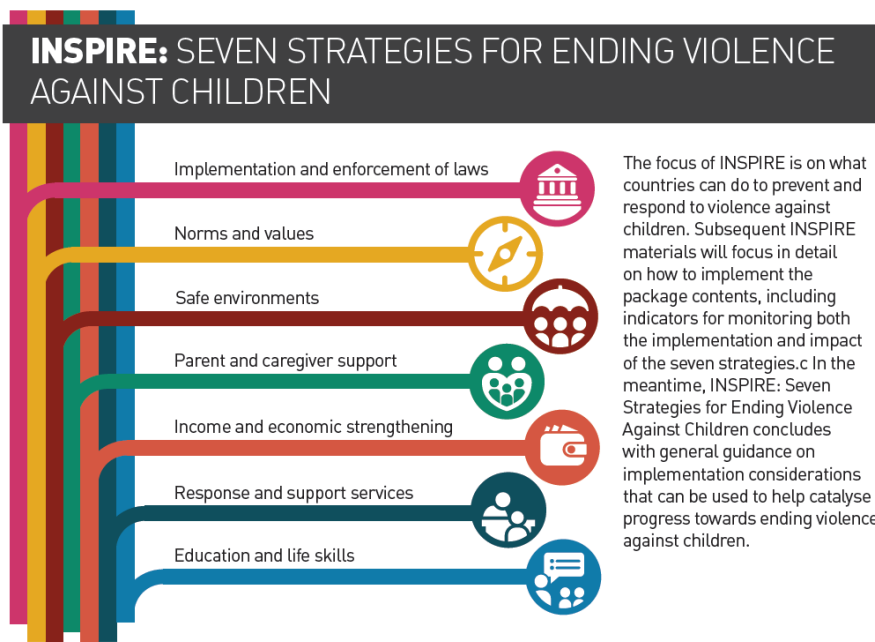


An increase to three digits (+148%) also includes sexual acts with children under age 14 or under age 16 in the case of close relatives and caregivers: there were 411 victims in 2015, 78% of which were females. Sexual and aggravated violence instead dropped over 5 years, down -26% and -31% respectively, but in absolute terms (around 908 minors in 2015, over 82% females), these are the types of violence with the greatest number of victims after abuse in the home (1,442, + 24%) and family support obligation violations (961, +9% compared to 2011) where the percentage of females is pretty much the same as the number of males.

### Global Alliance Against Violence

On July 12, 2016 at UN Headquarters, the representatives of the member states, international institutions, universities, NGOs, foundations, businesses and youth associations signed a global pact to make eliminating violence against children a top priority, to be achieved with the commitment and accountability of all. The new coalition, coalizione [End Violence Against Children - The Global Partnership](#), which is part of Terre des Hommes, works actively with field projects, advocacy and pressure groups to counter abuse, labor and sexual exploitation, trafficking, torture and all forms of violence against children. A coalition of media created a trust fund, which already includes 40 million pounds, donated by the British government specifically to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children online.

The new Global Partnership launched INSPIRE, a package of **seven strategies with proven efficacy to combat and prevent violence against children**, formulated in consultation with international bodies including the World Health Organization<sup>128</sup> and UNODC, the UN office to combat drugs and crime. These strategies start with the approval and implementation of laws to



combat violence, creating safe spaces for children - especially in situations of conflict and disasters, offering economic support to vulnerable families, providing emergency and long-term care services the victims, strengthening educational services and providing life skills. For information: [www.end-violence.org](http://www.end-violence.org)

<sup>128</sup> The other organizations are: CDC, End Violence Against Children, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Together for Girls, UNICEF, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and World Bank.

### How many victims are victims of domestic violence?

(in %)

|                                     | Girls (15-19 years) | Women up to the age of 49 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Peru                                | 20                  | 13                        |
| Nicaragua                           | 12                  | 8                         |
| Haiti                               | 33                  | 15                        |
| Sierra Leone                        | 31                  | 29                        |
| Gabon                               | 40                  | 32                        |
| Democratic Republic<br>of the Congo | 36                  | 37                        |
| Namibia                             | 52                  | 30                        |
| Egypt                               | 17                  | 14                        |
| Cameroon                            | 36                  | 31                        |
| Malawi                              | 26                  | 22                        |
| Zimbabwe                            | 37                  | 27                        |
| Pakistan                            | 22                  | 18                        |
| Jordan                              | 18                  | 14                        |

Source: UNAIDS



*Photo: Ahed Izhiman*

## **Chapter 10 – A journey among Italian teenagers: gender violence, stereotypes and “dangerous” surfing**

The observatory on gender violence and stereotypes started by Terre des Hommes in co-operation with **ScuolaZoo** this year involved 2,001 girls and boys aged between 14 and 19 and included in the research several new municipalities, also very small ones.

Despite the change in the sample, the data gathered seem to substantially confirm those acquired in the previous surveys, but with some significant exceptions.

Let’s go through those data together analysing the three main research areas: gender violence; gender stereotypes; use of social networks.

### **Gender violence: between awareness and justification**

First of all, we need to clarify one aspect: **Italian boys and girls are aware that violence embeds also a gender issue**, mainly domestic violence. As much as **79%** of those interviewed stated **Not**

**to agree** with the affirmation “domestic violence is not very common, it deals just with isolated incidents”, that are emphasized by the press aiming at dramatising.

They are also increasingly aware that gender violence is not tolerable, not even at home: in fact, 89.3% interviewees (and 92.3% of the girls) **agreed** that “women should not tolerate violence in the couple, more so if they have children”.

The awareness campaigns in recent years, as well as the increased media focus on the issue and public opinion drive, are apparently resulting in small but important steps towards an increased awareness, at least among the youngest ones.

However, some shady areas remain, that seem to be heading for what we at Terre des Hommes defined as “**the search for an alibi**”, a justification for violence, beyond cultural or context issues. The recurrence of some answers, even compared to the past, is also meaningful: 46.3% interviewees agreed with the statement “men who abuse, are drug or alcohol addicted”; 48.7% agrees with the idea that “domestic violence results from a temporary loss of control”; 27.6% believes that “men abusing their partner/wife suffered abuses as children”; as much as 49.6% thinks that “men abusing women, do so just because they are “impotent”, thus belittling violence to the pure sexual component.

Also the prejudice associated to the social-economic conditions of the abusers still persists: albeit a minor percentage, 32.2% of those interviewed (and please note 40.7% males!) thinks that “domestic violence is more common in families with no education or that are very poor”, which reveals a strong distortion of information, or simply a deep bias, that has little or nothing to do with reality. The attempt to find an “excuse” for gender violence made by a significant percentage of the interviewees, may be a way to avert it from one’s own alleged “normality”; perhaps it deals with a real lack of information, or it is an extreme attempt to marginalize it, despite the increased awareness. However, it could also be the other side of the widespread belief (luckily not shared by a vast majority) that “what happens in a couple is a private matter. No one should interfere”. 30.2% of those interviewed (item 8) agrees with such idea, perhaps associating it with the *arriere-pensee* that there is little to investigate, because such things happen and they should concern only the couple partners.

### **Gender stereotypes: yes to equality, but the Pater Familias is always lurking**

A lot is being said about gender violence and, above all, about its climax, i.e. “femicide”, while little is being said about the persisting of gender stereotypes in realities like the Italian one, that does not stand out for women’s participation in economic activities (above all in top positions), equal pay (we are very far from the north European excellence standards), or the number of little girls and girls attending scientific classes and faculties.

Nevertheless, it seems difficult to separate the unflattering results obtained in terms of men-women equality from the perception of the women’s role in society.

The survey on the topic carried out by Terre des Hommes in the Italian schools still renders a *chiaroscuro* portrait.

On the one hand a small minority deny the women’s active role in the economic and family life. In fact, data seem encouraging from that point of view: 90.9% think that “men and women shall both contribute to the family income”; 87.7% believes that “when a woman works, the family life is [NOT] affected from that”; while, 88.5% think that “men shall help in doing the housework”, and when it comes to discuss “important family affairs”, the decisions shall be made by mutual agreement between the spouses, according to 93.2% of the interviewees.

On the other hand, from the survey bottom line, it seems to clearly emerge the persisting dichotomy between the “hunter” man, managing social life and resolving conflicts, and the “woman” angel of the domestic hearth: so 27.9% of the boys interviewed answered that “looking after the house is a women’s task”; 45.2% thinks that “women’s main role is to be mothers”, but the percentage rises to



53.4% when it comes to boys; and only 55.7% (only 52% of the boys) agrees with the statement that “also men should stay at home from work after the birth of children” – a recent and important achievement in north European countries.

In the background, repeatedly pushed back by morals and the Italian law, crops up again domineering the figure of the Pater Familias. “Men shall rule their own house” stated 45.6% of the boys interviewed!

Clearly a lot of work is still to be done and girls, much more than boys, are aware of it: 93% of the girls states that “schools should introduce classes on the prevention of violence against women and the respect of gender identity”. However, “only” 78,6% of the boys agrees.

### **Social networks and safety: confident, perhaps too self-confident**

We keep on describing our children as digital natives, often mistaking growing up in a world plunged into a tireless exchange of binary combinations and heads bent on bright displays, with the acquisition of specific skills, which would make them real experts.

As a matter of fact, also the guys seem to be caught in the same snare. The reaction of the interviewees to the statements in the survey carried out by Terre des Hommes in co-operation with ScuolaZoo, show great confidence: 12.8% (and only 8.3% of the girls) agrees that “sending personal photos and videos of a sexual nature via SMS or chat is a normal practice, that is not dangerous at all”; 80.8% (and as much as 84.7% of the girls, who also in that case show to be more aware) states that “seeing your own images of a sexual nature circulating without consent on the net or in others’ mobile devices is as bad as undergoing an abuse”; “if I see that a friend of mine posts a content on a social network, that could cause him/her troubles or he/she should not post, I tell him/her” is what 85.7% of the sample says; 84.5% agrees on the statement “I think, I am good at protecting my privacy in Internet”.

However, one wonders, if such self-confidence is so well placed, given that when asked if “personal photos and videos of a sexual nature should be shared only among people that trust each other blindly” as much as 51.9% of the girls answered negatively and 47.2% of the girls believes that “what happens in Internet” is just virtual and would have no true connection with real life, including therefore the consequences of one’s behaviour online at school, among friends, within the family or in the future working life.

But perhaps they have doubts as well, as 84.3% of the boys and the girls would like “to use Internet at school, both as learning and teaching tool” on topics like freedom of expression, netiquette, etc. After many years of researches in the field, we at Terre des Hommes have less and less doubts on the importance of education on such topics.



*Photo: (c)STL KEREM YUCEL*

## **Conclusions**

During wars, any war, the Human Rights, all Human rights, are systematically violated. Temporary wars in particular, the so called asymmetric ones, the confessional and interreligious wars, terrorism of any nature and colour, distinguish for the total lack of rules, first among which respect and assistance to civilian populations.

Indeed, as we learned studying the sad statics of deaths, the most defenceless people are the ones, who are most affected by wars, from the Second World War to present. Here then, this year's Dossier Indifesa (Defenceless) highlights, among other things, how little girls have gradually become not only a wartime target, but a real battlefield in itself, which is represented by their own body.

The little girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, the ones forced to become the brides of the Caliphate guerrillas for a night of pleasure and then repudiated, but also all other child brides worldwide, as well as conscripted children, symbolize through their testimony and the dramatic numbers they express the barbarity of a world system still far behind as for the protection of their essential rights.

Ultimately, if we could look at peace and justice on international scale through the eyes of those girls, perhaps many hesitations and special interests could be replaced by a dialogue that secures our future.

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