In Italy a dramatic change is needed with reference to the policies on child abuse: it's what chronicles tell us and what the international sources have been claiming for a long time, inviting all the Nations to invest in strategies of analysis, prevention and monitoring of the phenomenon.

Among these voices there’s the report, “Toward a world free from violence”, published by Marta Santos Pais, the Special Representative against violence on children of the General Secretary of the United Nations (October 2013) in which the need of a systematic collection of data is strongly held in order to guarantee continuous monitoring of childhood violence and abuse. The same tone is maintained by the latest Recommendation of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child towards Italy; our Country must develop a “national system of collection, analysis and distribution of data, and a program of research about violence and child abuse” (CRC/C/ITA/CO/3-4, point 44).

Only a methodical and scientific knowledge of the epidemiological dimension of this phenomenon can lead to a development of efficient strategies to contrast child maltreatment. This is true both from a prevention perspective and from a protection and caring one. Therefore a Nation without such knowledge is strongly called to face the issue and adjust its tools and policies.

As a first response to this need, the Children’s Ombudsman of Italy (National Authority for Children and Adolescents) has promoted, in collaboration with CISMAI and Terre des Hommes, the hereby presented National Survey on child maltreatment in Italy. This finally aims to give Italy a scientific, reliable method to capture the phenomenon of child abuse.

This research is the first Italian experience on this issue based on an internationally approved methodology and on the most innovative European studies on the subject. In this way Italy has gained the opportunity to get out of the circle of the countries with no records, giving way to a comparative analysis of the phenomenon at international level.

The survey has covered a population of 2,4 million children - with residence in Italy - constituting the 25% of the total Italian children population. This is actually the first and only statistically significant experience of this kind, ever achieved in the Country, lacking so far of any precise and up-to-date picture of child violence.
The sampled population lived in the Italian municipalities that were identified with the support of the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) and contacted in cooperation with ANCI (the National Association of Italian Municipalities). Data have been issued by the Social Services.

Municipalities have been divided into a 4-way territorial partition (North-West, North-East, Centre, South & Isles) and a 4-way district classification (Metropolitan Municipalities, Hinterland Municipalities, Municipalities with up to 10000 inhabitants, Municipalities with over 10000 inhabitants), for a total of 16 crossing lines. The selection of the samples has been led by a probability calculus proportioned to child population in each Municipality. The 12 Metropolitan Municipalities have been considered self-representatives and automatically included among the samples.

The total sum of Municipalities included in the study was 231, out of 7898 Italian Municipalities that have a child population of 20 individuals at least.

A survey sheet was sent to the Social Services of the Municipalities, requesting data regarding birth, age, gender, kind of abuse suffered.

III. OUTCOME

According to the survey results, it is notable how the size of the phenomenon of child abuse in Italy is not very different from other European Countries.
In fact, the surfacing "Country Reality" shows that 4 children out of 1,000 have been taken in charge by Social Services, for a total sum of 457,453 children.

The geographical distribution of assisted children is not uniform in the Country, as it decreases in the Centre (44.5 minors out of 1,000 compared to 63.1 in the North) and in the South (30.5 out of 1,000 minor inhabitants).

The situation does not change if we focus on children taken in charge for maltreatment: 91,272 (9.5 out of 1,000) is the number of children assisted for this reason with some remarkable geographical differences: 9.8 in the North, 11.6 in the Centre, 8.4 in the South.

Moreover, abusing is more frequent in metropolitan areas.

But who are these children victims of violence?

When considering the total child population, no notable differences are registered between males and females taken in charge for abuse (9.5 out of 1000 in both cases). Nevertheless this changes remarkably when we consider the cases of abuse children taken in charge as compared to the total number of cases taken in charge by Social Services. Here 212.6 out of 1.000 are females, while 193.5 males.

A significant data concerns foreign children under care for abuse, who are more than double if compared to the Italians: out of 1,000 foreign children resident in Italy 20 have been taken in charge by the Social Services for abuse, as opposed to 8.3 Italians.

But if we deepen the analysis of the link between victims and type of abuse we find that, out of the over 91 thousand children taken in charge for maltreatment, with no regard to the starting cause of the assistance, 57.740 have later received support for a specific abuse. Again, more than 33.000
is the number of children who received the support of the Social Services but who were not initially recognized as victims of abuse.

This survey shows that the evident the type of abuse (as in the case of sexual abuses), the faster the provision of assistance to the child for that specific reason. On the contrary, when the type of maltreatment is harder to recognize, such as physical and emotional neglect, the access to a proper support is delayed, with a considerable impact on the effectiveness of care.

**IV. TYPES OF ABUSE**

With regard to the types of abuse the survey highlights that more than half of the abused children suffers a deep neglect, including inappropriate child care practices (such as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy, chemical abuse, etc.).

Witnessing domestic violence is the second most common type of abuse among those registered: about 1 out of 5 abused children is a witness of domestic violence.

Emotional abuse exceeds physical abuse of more than a third (11.5% as opposed to 7.7%). The least occurring type is sexual abuse, affecting less than 5 out of 100 abused children.

**V. SERVICES PROVIDED TO CHILDREN VICTIMS IN ITALY**

As for the protection services taken on by the Social Services, we find that each child has access to an average of two of them. Most frequently: economic support to the family (28%), hospitality in residential care centres (19.3%), home visiting (18%), fostering (14.4%), day care centres for
children (10.2%). Among the “Others” we can find different measures taken such as educational support, counseling, occasional psychological support, etc.

VI. ITALY: A COMPARISON WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

Comparing the results with data from other Countries, we see that the cases of neglect and witnessing domestic violence seem to equal those recorded in the U.S.A., whereas sexual abuse is on the lowest ranges among the Developed Nations. The causes of this low incidence, whether due to a real limited phenomenon or to poor reporting or detection, should be investigated.