



## Policy considerations for the EU2020 strategy

**Comments by the Swedish family organisation Haro for Freedom of Choice, Equality and Parenthood. Haro is also a member of the EU Familyplatform project.**

As a family organisation Haro is concerned with the development of future family policies. There is evidence that the young generation in the Western world is suffering from less and less time with their parents and other adults they are emotionally attached to. There is evidence from many sources that this can lead to a plummeting psychological health, less successful learning and problems with conformity, peer-orientation, bullying and in worst case violence and crime. There is also qualitative research showing that this phenomena can be expected in countries where children and adolescents spend too many hours a day isolated from the people they are emotionally attached to – generally parents and other adults the parents are close to such as relatives, friends and neighbours.

Modern industrial society has diminished the "village of attachment" for children and adolescents. Many young people spend 40-50 hours a week together with people they are not emotionally attached to in day care, kindergarten, school including before- and after school activities. Fifty years ago this was different with grandmothers, aunts and neighbours within the children's "village of attachment" which as this time often included teachers as well. At this time democratic values were passed on from generation to generation through emotional attachment. Today the isolation from attachment leads to that millions of children and adolescents attach to their peers rather than to the adult world. At best this only leads to conformity, mild emotional defensiveness and lack of interests in school and learning. At worst this leads to strong emotional defensiveness, a flat-lining of culture, psychological ill-health, bullying, violence and crime in a *Lord of the Flies* scenario. Internationally renowned Canadian psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld has explained this psychological phenomena in detail in his book *Hold on to your kids*.

Research from different sources give strong evidence to this development. Studies on early child care show that long hours in day care away from parents increase problem behaviour – a clear indicator of lack of adult attachment. Evidence also

shows that the academic gains in early child care do not last in school – rather it seems that learning is pushed at a too early stage. Psychological health is plummeting fastest in Sweden among eleven comparable countries according to a Swedish Government study, SOU 2006:77, although Sweden has more high quality day care from one year of age than practically any other Western nation. Also school results are down in Sweden as well as order in the classroom, according the Swedish National Agency for Education. Bullying is growing problem in schools all over the Western world, also in Sweden.

In envisioning the year 2020 Europe may have true democratic problems if a large number of people lack sufficient emotional development due to lack of quality in adult attachment through several generations. The spirit of democracy is ultimately dependent on the emotional health and maturity in a population. Many signs show that there is a great hidden problem here. Emotional health is a very strong social legacy. If we are deteriorating the quality of attachment in parenthood, Europe may face very serious social and democratic problems within one or two generation in the countries which are weak on adult attachment for children and adolescents.

The European Union must take long term measures to start rebuilding the "village of attachment" for our children and adolescents. The first steps need to be to acknowledge parenthood politically, financially and as a highly developing and valuable vocation.

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