

November 20, 2016 – Universal Children's Day

New-borns and children, the greatest resource on earth, the biggest concern for psychologists

<http://efpa.eu/news/november-20universal-children-s-day;-psychologists-very-concerned>

On this day, November 20, the UN International Children's Day, the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations - EFPA- calls attention to the next generation, all children who in this moment are being born into a world of beauty, but also one of war, migration and atrocities.

New-borns, babies, infants. They are the most promising part of humankind, each with individual characteristics, able to communicate, sense, feel, touch and be touched. The knowledge-revolution of the psychology of early childhood has provided new insights into both the capacities and vulnerability of infants.

'Even though we now know that the brain all through our lives is very flexible, and we always can hope to aid in adjusting our abilities and coping strategies, we also know that important cornerstones for mental health, as well as the foundation for learning, social competence and the prospects of adult civil participation and fulfilment of hopes and dreams, are laid during the first years of our lives', says **Kerstin Söderström of EFPA Board Human Rights & Psychology**.

During the first years of life, inequality, discrimination and suboptimal developmental conditions influence the architecture of the brain, and the habitual way of being and surviving. Although born to trust, love and connect, infants soon adapt to hostile and meagre conditions. Infants are not too young to understand, or to be protected by innocence and immaturity. They are fully attuned to the emotional language of the surroundings, and are vulnerable to toxic stress, neglect and violence. Healthy attachment is a benefit for development.

Right to life and development, and to care and protection

November 20 marks the day on which the UN Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in 1959, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in 1989. The CRC is the most signed and amended convention in history, indicating that this bold statement cuts across cultural and religious differences, and manage to capture a world-wide intuitive stance of protection and promotion of children's rights and needs.

Although widely acclaimed, the CRC principles are violated on a large scale in today's Europe. Social inequalities and limited opportunities are handed from one generation to the next. In response to the great number of refugees seeking safety in Europe, many governments have twisted the principle of the best interest of the child up-side-down to fit into a restrictive immigration policy. Discriminatory practices and structural, mental and concrete or barbed wire barriers threaten the fulfilment of children's rights and the urgent need to protect and support children and their parents.

Closing the gap in one generation

Given the rapid development, dependency, and vulnerability of infants, the World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) has developed a position paper to recognize specific Rights of Infants in order to motivate infant oriented actions and policies at both community and societal levels. The science of early childhood and the rights of infants should guide policies of supports for mothers, fathers and caregivers, and in giving value to young children in contexts of risk and violence.

The WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health describes social justice as a matter of life and death. By doing the right things in the formative years, we can close the gap between disadvantage and advantage in one generation. EFPA supports the Commission's recommendation that governments build universal coverage of a comprehensive package of quality early child development programs and services for children, mothers, and other caregivers, regardless of ability to pay. Psychologists are encouraged to spread the knowledge on the importance of early development, and contribute to structure and professional content of early childhood services.

A basic assumption in EFPAs policy is that psychology matters in Human Rights, and Human Rights matter in Psychology, and the federation aims to strengthen our profession's capacities and qualifications to promote Human Rights and to prevent violations and to alleviate the effects.

On Children's day, **Polli Hagenaars, chair of EFPA's Board Human Rights & Psychology** urge member associations and psychologists in Europe to take in that the Convention on the rights of the child, Article 3 requires that: "In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration".

Read more:

WAIMH Position paper on the Rights of Infants

Convention on the Rights of the Child

WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health 2008.pdf

<http://www.un.org/en/events/childrenday/>

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Contact:

Kerstin.soderstrom (at) hil.no

polli.hagenaars (at) HumanRightsEFPA.eu