

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2020:12

**Complete people
-fragmented services.
Social exclusion of young
people in deprived city areas**

Complete people – fragmented services

There is an increasing worry related to exclusion of young people growing up in so-called deprived city areas. In this report, we study social exclusion and how to prevent it in these neighbourhoods. Exclusion can be defined in objective terms as lack of participation in social life, or in subjective terms as lack of belonging. On commission from the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) the main question analyzed in this report is:

“How do young people’s experiences and needs for services match with service providers’ supply to them in deprived living areas in Norwegian cities?”

This research question is based in our “bottom-up perspective”. A central condition of this report is that in order for the help that service providers give to be effective and preventive, it must be rooted in the users’ perception of their own needs. This analytical condition is central to the report. The first part of the report is about the young people’s own perspectives, the second part is about the perspective of the service providers, and the third part is about the extent to which these two perspectives match or mismatch. A key hypothesis in this report is that the degree to which young people’s experiences do not match up with that of the staff employed by the service providers will lay the foundation for mistrust between “receivers of help” and “the helpers”.

The analysis is based on 20 interviews with young people between the ages of 16 and 20 and 18 interviews with employees in upper secondary school, leisure time activities, the police and employees from “områdesatsinger”, a coordinated, cross-sectoral effort to improve living conditions in vulnerable living areas in large cities in Norway. All the young people interviewed live or have grown up in Fjell in Drammen, Furuset/Alna in Oslo or Solheim Nord / Solheimsviken in Bergen.

The first part of the report is based on interviews with young people from these three residential areas. We find that the young define their own needs as rather basic and relatively modest. They wish for a school to attend, a leisure activity to participate in, to have friends and preferably to earn some money from a part-time job. For their own future they wish to complete upper secondary school, they wish to find a job and to find their own place to live. Here and now, they wish to experience a sense of coping and meaning in their lives, and to feel secure. To them this is not the same as being best in school, but to be able to get along in their lives, be able to get to school in time, and have the opportunity and ability to be social in a group. In sum, the young wish for practice in “coping

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with life”. To achieve this they would like to have an adult person to be “on their side”, like a youth worker or a community worker, but at the same time someone who knows the service system so well that they know who to contact if the young persons should require more specialized help.

In the second part, we find that the employees and leaders in the services regard the challenges and problems young people face as interconnected with their living conditions and poor home conditions. They see the young people as part of a broader deprivation and poverty problem, linked to the specific areas in which they grew up. The challenges of the young are interpreted as being part of a series of problems like poor housing, parents’ lack of societal integration and immigration backgrounds, parents lacking labour market participation and integration in the local community. Furthermore, the employees in the services state that although many of the young people belong to a gang which provides them with a sense of belonging, these gangs also represents a problem in the sense that they act as potential avenues for recruitment into criminal activity. Where the gang spirals into a negative dynamic, the young people may experience a strong sense of loyalty to their peers and may be dragged into criminal activity in the neighbourhood. Employees and leaders in the service providers also felt they had some limitations placed upon themselves, which made it difficult to help the young people. One such limitation was the experienced difficulties in cross-sectoral collaboration another was lack of resources.

In the third part of the report, we looked at how well the young people’s perspective matches the perspective of the employees from the service providers. The starting point of such an analysis of “matching” is that by studying the young people’s needs and the service providers’ responses to these needs, it will be possible to identify so-called best practices, i.e. examples of what the services providers have done when the young people feel that they have been seen and heard. We find that the service providers agree that the young need to experience achievement, safety and belonging. However, there are some aspects that the representatives from the services emphasize much more strongly than the young people themselves. The services in particular emphasize what we have called a “family perspective” and a “gang perspective”. The most important mismatch between the young people and the service provides is however that the young first and foremost regard themselves as one whole individual, whereas the service providers regard them as individuals with complex needs. The young people emphasize that what they need is one person who can see them as a whole person. This wish is not always granted, and the services do not always take into account how important it is for the young people that this need is being met. Because the services are highly specialized by definition, the young people will experience meeting a divided service sector, the help from which does not always feel relevant to them.

Put differently, the young people feel they need a coordinating unit, which can help them as whole people. This is challenging for the service providers, as none of the representatives from the services we have interviewed apply an institutionalized perspective taking the whole individual into account.