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NEWS

Vulnerable young people – how best to find them jobs and a place in society?

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Text: Björn Lindahl, photo: Martin Zachrisson / Norden.org

What is needed to help vulnerable young people be included in work, education and society? A new report sums up the situation in the Nordics. Here is a spoiler: There is no "quick fix".

Vulnerable young people are those aged between 13 and 29 who face many different types of problems. They might have learning difficulties, psychological challenges or physical handicaps. They might be youths in foster care or under the care of the child welfare service, young people with anti-social behaviour, or young people who struggle to find belonging in their local community.

Because the groups are so different, there is no one-size-fits-all when trying to find ways of helping them. But are there still experiences that can be shared between the Nordic countries?

That was the task given by the Nordic Council of Ministers to researchers at KAI, the Centre for Work Inclusion at the OsloMet university.

They went through 84 Nordic studies plus 17 other meta-analyses to see whether there were any commonalities.

“Vulnerable young people are not helped by general measures. It is important to develop good relations with the young. To be seen as an ordinary human being and not just some outsider is very important, as we see in many of these studies,” said Anne Leseth as their report was presented during a digital Nordic seminar on 15 September.

Inclusion can happen on an individual level, in relation to other people and on a structural level – i.e. how people are included when it comes to institutions like schools, jobs and authorities.

“Politicians and researchers must continuously discuss who should be included into what, how this should happen and why. This also goes beyond young people needing to get themselves included – there has to be some mutual interest in the process.”

With the structural level in mind, the most important thing is to secure good coordination between different welfare services, work, health and education. The different services should also listen to what the young people want. If not, all too often things end up like they did at a job centre in Finland:

Young jobseeker with Eastern European background: “I am a musician and would like to work in the culture sector.”

Employment officer: “How about construction? Or the service industry?”

According to Anne Leseth there are many stereotypical theories about why young people are marginalised and what kind of work suits them.

“It is important to have skilled adults who understand that this takes time. It is something that must be ongoing non-stop – you have not reached the goal as soon as a 25-year-old has got a job. There must be follow-up.”

Andreea I Alecu pointed out that not many of the 63 studies looked at cooperation between the structures and what worked well on an individual level.

“Few studies look at what effect the measures have, only 12 of them do. The studies say very little about how the measures work across different groups of young people and in what time perspective. These are important questions that ought to be studied further.”

The studies do, however, show what the researchers call two robust findings:

1. Wage subsidies, employment measures and measures like IPS (Individual Placement and Support) and SE (Supported Employment) seem to have a positive effect on inclusion in work and education.
2. In-work training and apprenticeships do not seem to have much effect. This is based mainly on Norwegian studies and not on longer-term effects.

Kjetil Frøyland gave a more detailed description of what IPS and SE really is when it comes to work inclusion. Both methods focus on workplace training with individually adapted help, rather than a gradual approach to work through courses and participation in various groups.

There are four important principles for IPS:

1. The aim is to secure employment in the ordinary labour market
2. Integration should happen in the workplace with help from a dedicated team
3. The individuals' preferences and choices should count for a lot
4. Measures should have no time limit

More qualitative-oriented studies, however, show that internships can be of good help for vulnerable young people and contribute to their inclusion.

Kjetil Frøyland also pointed out that things take time, both establishing contact with the young people and for employment officers who work with these groups to find employers in the local area who can learn to know them. It might “of course be a challenge” not to put a time limit on how long the support measures should be in place, as he put it.

“It is also important to continuously adjust the working tasks in the workplace for the young people.”

Employers might be more or less motivated to include marginalised youths, but there are also big variations between trades.

“Some, like the retail sector, have working tasks where no education is needed, while in other sectors you need an education or an apprenticeship. Workplaces differ and many of the studies point out that they might need support in order to get good at inclusion.”

Kjetil Frøyland also sees the need for more research, first and foremost into what “inclusion skills” is. What skills do you actually need to get to know young people and their needs, and to bring them into a workplace and train them there?

Despite the fact that the studies have used different methods, the Nordic report still shows that there is a common view that can be summed up like this, according to Kjetil Frøyland:

- There is no single measure that can solve the problems.
- It is important to build relations with the young people and offer them tailored help, preferably from people with special skills. It is also important to offer different meeting places where young people can meet other young people and helpers from different institutions.
- Help must be coordinated.
- It takes time.



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Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130 Oslo



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