NORDIC COUNCIL
of Ministers

NABO – SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH IN SWEDEN

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

→ CREATING MEANINGFUL AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION FOR YOUTH

HOW TO BOOST SOCIAL INCLUSION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

It is possible to boost a sense of inclusion and belonging to society among young people. Focus groups with young people indicate that quite simple things can make a difference. Experiencing oneself as part of a larger community, for example in a club or association, is something that many young people consider to be important. This is especially emphasised during the focus groups with young people who live in areas that are perceived to have a poor reputation. Such areas can be found both in cities and in rural areas.

A mere half of the Swedish youth feel that they are included, and just over half feel that they are needed in Swedish society. The percentage is lower among young people in rural areas, than among young people in both cities and disadvantaged areas.

MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON SOCIETY

Young people are interested in society and want to have an impact. However, the survey shows that less than a third believe that they have good opportunities to present their opinions to the municipality's decision-makers, and four out of ten feels that the decision-makers do not listen to people's suggestions and opinions. Considering this, proven models must be utilised to increase young people's influence.

RECOMMENDATION

→ **Consider the level of representation** Youth are diverse groups of individuals and have different needs. How do you ensure that as many young people as possible are able to feel represented by those who participate in decision-making?

→ **Create a secure context** How do you create a space that is secure and open, where the participants feel safe, and dare to present opinions that others might not agree with?

→ **Increase the probability of a Yes** How do you ensure that at least some suggestions are implemented, and fairly soon?

→ **Provide acknowledgement and feedback** How do you ensure that young people receive acknowledgement and feedback on their ideas?

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– *YES, IT IS NICE TO BE HEARD SOMETIMES.*
– *YES, EXACTLY.*
– *AND TO HEAR WHAT OTHERS THINK TOO.*
– *AND THAT SOMEONE IS LISTENING.*

BOYS, RURAL AREA

IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS FOR UPPER-SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDIES IN RURAL AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS

During the focus groups, young people that need to commute or move away from home to attend upper-secondary school describe their situation as difficult. Those who commute a long distance lacks the time and energy for meaningful leisure time activities. For some, it becomes a financial issue to move away from home to attend upper-secondary school.

During the focus groups, participants from disadvantaged areas describe the insecurity they experience when attending upper-secondary school in an area with a higher socioeconomic status. They also explain that they are regularly subjected to racism and other indignities when they spend time in areas other than their own.

RECOMMENDATION

→ **Assess needs** Find out what kind of support is needed by youth who commute long distances or move away from home to attend upper-secondary school.

→ **Expand the networks of young people** Create safe spaces/meeting places where young people from different areas can get to know each other under secure and inclusive conditions during their leisure time.

– NO, BUT THEN WE TEND TO BE VERY CREATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO STUFF LIKE THAT, WE ALWAYS COME UP WITH A SOLUTION. I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYTHING WE CAN'T DO, ACTUALLY.

GIRL, DISADVANTAGED AREA

SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Positive social relationships are important for young people's social inclusion. Relationships contribute with knowledge and contacts, support and appreciation. And at the community level they increase trust between people and the ability to cooperate, which in turn promotes democracy.

During all focus groups, discussions circulate around similar descriptions of social networks. Regardless of area the participants talk about how they use their networks for practical help, getting a job or social support. At the same time, in most focus groups, there are young people who do not mention or discuss their networks at all.

The survey shows that more than one in six youths have been bullied or frozen out during the past six months and one in three have been abused or treated unfairly in a serious way. More than one in seven say that they do not confide in anyone. In all areas, girls are more often exposed to bullying and ostracising behaviour, while boys more seldom confide in others.

During the focus groups, both girls and boys who avoid confiding in others say it is because they don't trust people to keep their secrets or confidence. The participants also say that they feel most vulnerable in school. They stress that adults at school rarely act in a manner to stop or prevent bullying and

abuse from continuing. During the discussions the participants repeatedly link why they are subjected to such behaviour with the strict norms surrounding one's own gender, and how you are supposed to act and behave according to such norms.

RECOMMENDATION

→ **Support the emergence of positive relationships and friendships between young people – There is often a lack of secure and inclusive meeting places for young people who do not conform to norms in various ways.**

→ **Take a holistic approach to the social situation at school How can you encourage young people to trust and confide in others?**

→ **Intensify the work to counteract bullying and harassment How can you support other adults and youth to be active bystanders and act in a manner that prevents such behaviour?**

→ **Discuss norms How can you help young people to develop and reach their full potential, without being limited by gendered norms that affect their actions and behaviour?**

SUPPORT YOUTHS' ENGAGEMENT AND DESIRE TO IMPROVE

During the focus groups, the youth describe their participation in organised activities. They talk about situations where they feel secure and take active part in the planning of activities. Coming together in an organisation or around activities is seen as beneficial both to themselves and others. It creates a feeling of community and belonging – to be part of something greater. This is particularly prominent during the focus groups in disadvantaged, rural and sparsely populated areas. Discussions where the participants talk about the pride in doing something for their community or local area.

During the focus groups the participants explain that some areas are considered better, while others are considered inferior. This division is part of the youth's everyday life and something that they must relate to. In both the rural and disadvantaged areas, the participants explain that they live in areas considered to be inferior. The preconception of the area influences how they themselves are received in different context and are considered to affect their own reputation and opportunities. They emphasise that their home area is a good place and explains how the preconceptions does not paint the true picture of the area.

Several participants in both rural and disadvantaged areas talk about their commitment to improve and create opportunities where they live. Others want to move away instead – some because they no longer believe in the area's future and others because they wish to study at the university or work somewhere else.

RECOMMENDATION

→ **Encourage young people's own participation and organisation** How can you promote and encourage young people to organise themselves and create the activities and contexts they desire? Prioritise groups of young people who are not organised or have less resources for self-organisation. Such as youth in rural, sparsely populated and disadvantaged areas.

→ **All areas are nice in their own way** What can you do to reduce negative stereotypes regarding areas and neighbourhoods where you live? Think about how you can question or nuance the picture when you hear preconceptions or falsity.

→ **Make it reasonable** How can you contribute in ensuring that public services, decisions and priorities are inclusive and provides support for youths in rural, sparsely populated and disadvantaged areas?

→ **Make it visible** In which way can you contribute to increased visibility for young people in rural, sparsely populated and disadvantaged areas in various contexts?

SIMILAR CONDITIONS IN RURAL, SPARSELY POPULATED AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS

The strategy of the Nordic Council of Ministers states that *the Nordic Region must be the best place in the world for children and young people*. The study shows that several of the challenges that focus group participants face in disadvantaged areas are also raised by participants in rural areas and sparsely populated areas.

A FEW OF THESE SHARED CHALLENGES ARE

→ Doubt as to whether others view them as an equal part of a national or regional community. This is described as an issue concerning both representation and equal opportunities.
  – Representation in the sense of being made visible by others.
  – Equal opportunities in the sense that public services, decisions and priorities are structured so that it feels possible and reasonable to live, grow up and be a young person even when based in rural, sparsely populated or disadvantaged areas.

→ Lack of meeting places and youth centres for different groups of young people. In some cases because they do not exist, in other cases because they are taken over by certain groups of boys, which excludes girls and other groups of boys.

→ Distrust in public actors' interest in listening to its residents. But also, in their ability to economise with taxpayer's money and do things that are good for the residents. Scepticism towards the municipality is common.

→ The experience of declining engagement in the local community where, for example, events that were previously organised are shut down, because the backing of non-profit actors is lacking.

→ A feeling that the place has become worse since the youth themselves grew up, and a doubt as to whether the development is reversible.

→ The issue of fighting for the area or giving up and resigning themselves to the negative development, represents a dividing line between the participants.

ABOUT NABO

NABO is a project launched under the Swedish presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers 2018. The project runs over the period 2018-2020 and seeks to make the youth perspective visible through the words of Nordic youth. Young people's voices will be heard in questions regarding their lives. And based on that knowledge they will be given the opportunity to participate and influence political decisions.

Young people are asked to describe their everyday lives and how they perceive their opportunities and obstacles. From their stories Nabo builds a framework of success factors for social inclusion in the Nordic region.

In this folder you can find key findings and recommendations from the Swedish study. Hopefully the results can work as a guide for you in creating meaningful and inclusive participation for youth. Similar studies are carried out in the other Nordic countries and in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

In this document we highlight some concrete measures. These have been specially developed to respond to the challenges that the youth address during the focus groups. They are intended to build upon the opportunities, power and resources found within the young people themselves.

Please read the entire report Fokus 18 for more information (in Swedish): www.mucf.se/publikationer

Learn more about the Nabo project: www.mucf.se/nabo