

PREVENTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXCLUSION

Measures aimed at preventing young people's exclusion are implemented in individual administrative sectors and on a cross-sectoral basis. Objectives regarding the prevention of exclusion are included in many basic activities that are financed with government grants. Objectives regarding the prevention of exclusion have also been set for many projects concerning young people.

Usually exclusion refers to a situation where people suffer from the cumulative disadvantages of long-term and often repeated unemployment, problems making ends meet, adjustment problems and social isolation. In this audit preventing young people's exclusion refers to all those measures intended to keep young people from becoming excluded.

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the effectiveness of cross-sectoral measures aimed at preventing young people's exclusion. The main audit questions concerned the preconditions for the effectiveness of preventive measures, the actual effectiveness of measures and the economic significance of measures. The audit focused on the administrative sectors of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Labour. The broad subject of preventing exclusion was approached through two specific types of measures, pupil welfare services and young people's workshops.

On the basis of audit observations, the effectiveness of measures aimed at preventing young people's exclusion has not been scrutinized. Information regarding the economic significance of preventing exclusion is also fragmented and cannot be used to provide a reliable picture of the total costs of this activity. It has been estimated, however, that if a young person gets on the wrong path and is permanently excluded from the labour market, the resulting costs to society are on the order of a million euros before the person reaches the age of 60. Since preventing exclusion is typically an

objective of a broader statutory function or package of measures, in the opinion of the National Audit Office a key precondition for effectiveness in preventing young people's exclusion is the good management of basic activities.

Concepts with regard to preventing exclusion vary and are open to interpretation. For instance, in some contexts exclusion is considered to be a stigmatic concept. The audit indicated that conceptual problems are not an obstacle to the effective prevention of exclusion, however. At the practical level professionals in different fields deal with individuals' concrete problems in their work, and conceptual problems are secondary. On the basis of audit observations, in preventing exclusion and setting related objectives it is important to address the concrete phenomena that are known to increase the risk of exclusion.

The audit indicated that the fragmented nature of measures aimed at preventing young people's exclusion is partly the result of problems involving current legislation and other regulations that guide activities. Current legislation does not support cooperation among administrative sectors and professionals in different fields in the best possible way. The preparation of legislation concerning multiple administrative sectors has proved challenging in the ministries. At the local level and in practical cooperation among professionals in different fields, problems particularly concern the interpretation of confidentiality regulations, which hampers the flow of information. Recently these problems have been reflected in discussion regarding the reform of pupil welfare legislation with the goal of an integrated and uniform Act.

In preventing young people's exclusion there is still a lot of room for developing cooperation procedures among professionals in different fields. The audit suggested that cooperation in networks and working groups is often superficial. Cooperation in the junctions of different stages of education and related responsibility issues are especially significant for young people. One reason for problems in cooperation is workers' different educational backgrounds. For example, teachers do not know enough about what social workers do and vice versa.

The audit observed that evaluating the overall effectiveness of measures aimed at preventing exclusion is practically impossible. This does not hinder the evaluation of specific measures, however.

Authorities responsible for preventing young people's exclusion should be better informed of other authorities' register data, indicators and completed evaluations. The data in many registers is also subject to charges, which weakens possibilities to use data in research.

One example of possibilities to evaluate effectiveness is a study that was conducted by the National Audit Office on the effectiveness of workshops for young people. Around 7,000 young people participate in 230 workshops each year. Roughly half of them have completed or dropped out of comprehensive school. During the 30-year history of workshop activities, numerous studies and evaluations have been conducted. These tell little about the effectiveness of workshop activities, however. According to the objectives set by the Ministry of Education, which is in charge of activities, two-thirds of the young people participating in workshops should find places in education, work or other guided activities after attending a workshop. The purpose of the study, which was based on interview and register materials, was to determine whether workshops have promoted young people's placement in work or education, taking into account other contributing factors.

According to the results of the study, participating in a workshop has not influenced young people's placement in work, but it has influenced placement in education. The results showed that young people without any kind of secondary education have benefited most from workshops. Interview materials also indicated that workshop activities have an impact. This is evident not only in placement in education or work, however, but increasingly in improved social and life management skills. Consequently placement information alone does not give an adequate picture of the effectiveness of activities. For more and more young people, workshop personnel believe that improving life management skills should be a sufficient objective in itself. This is because the target group has become more challenging.

The audit observed that although pupil welfare services have been evaluated quite broadly, evaluations have not focused on the actual effectiveness of measures. Evaluations have mainly concerned efficiency and have looked at the availability of services in different parts of the country. The unclear division of labour among actors taking part in evaluations has also weakened the evaluation

of the effectiveness of measures aimed at supporting learning. On the other hand individual local authorities have succeeded in evaluating the effectiveness of measures designed to decrease dropout in education.

The resources used to prevent exclusion are considerable. Depending on the method of evaluation, the costs are several billions. Cost monitoring is fragmented, however. If resources intended to prevent exclusion are not used effectively, it is likely that the social costs of dealing with real exclusion, together with all its side effects, will be considerably larger than the costs of preventive measures.