

## LIVING CONDITIONS – HEALTH

Young people living in disadvantaged communities are more vulnerable to specific health risks and are less likely to use or have access to quality health services. National and local health services should ensure that they can easily access affordable and youth-friendly health services. An example of how this can be achieved is demonstrated by the work of the Sammonlahti youth centre in Lappeenranta, Finland, in confronting the habit of smoking among young people.



### The following recommendations can help implement such policies:

- ▶ provide access to health services, health information services and social security services that are of high quality and are youth-friendly;
- ▶ invest in and support the personal and professional development of medical practitioners, nurses and community health workers working in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to ensure that they have skills, knowledge and attitudes that are youth-friendly, culturally sensitive and gender sensitive, and that their competences are up to date;
- ▶ ensure that medical professionals and other service providers have the necessary skills and resources to allow them to work with young people from different cultures and backgrounds. These include interpretation and/or cultural mediation services;
- ▶ design and deliver health and social services in a way that recognises the particular needs of young people who experience multiple forms of exclusion, for example young Roma, migrant women, young people suffering from poor mental health, young people with disabilities, or young people with HIV;
- ▶ invest in the development and delivery of support services, including crisis counselling and educational programmes that seek to improve, in a holistic way, the health and well-being of young people;
- ▶ engage community-based youth workers, social workers, educators and medical professionals in the development of support services. In particular, there should be a focus on programmes to deal with:
  - substance misuse and addiction;
  - sexual and reproductive health;
  - early, unplanned or crisis pregnancy;
  - mental health;
  - exercise;
  - nutrition;
  - family and work-life balance;

### Sammonlahti Youth Centre, Lappeenranta, Finland

— A gap was identified in the health services in relation to young smokers. Young people under 18 years of age were not allowed to buy any substitutes for cigarettes, and school or health services do not offer these young smokers any help in giving up smoking, except through talking about it or, most of the time, by employing school detention for those caught smoking.

— The project began in October 2013 in a local school. The school was a major partner and supporter of the project and the young people, making it possible for young people to attend the project meetings.

— The project group comprised 11 young people, aged between 13 and 17. Meetings included team-building activities, information about smoking and the risks attached to it, tests to measure carbon monoxide in the participants' breath, a significant amount of self-observation (for example, answering questions such as "How does smoking make you feel? When do you crave a cigarette? What would motivate you to quit?"), and examples of a healthy diet and the meaning of exercise.

— The young people who took part in the full project achieved the following results: three gave up smoking, one significantly reduced her level of smoking and one moved to another school before the end of the project.

— In early 2014, a second group of four young people was set up, in response to participant demand. The school has been happy with the results and has shown an interest in supporting this method of working in the future; as a result, the youth centre has considered the possibility of training some young people to act as peer leaders for future groups.

- ▶ ensure that health strategies are responsive to the needs of young people. Young people and youth workers from disadvantaged neighbourhoods should be directly involved in developing and making decisions about these strategies;
- ▶ promote sport and physical activity as a way of maintaining a healthy lifestyle inside and outside school. Ensure that young people have full and equal access to public sports facilities and, where necessary, invest in the provision or improvement of such amenities locally.