National strategy

There is no national strategy in Sweden for preventing early leaving from upper secondary education. The Swedish Government has though determined that it is particularly important that municipalities are well informed of the situation of early school leavers. Therefore an amendment was made to the Education Act [1] regarding the responsibilities of the municipalities. According to this amendment, Swedish municipalities have since January 2015 an explicit responsibility for early leavers from education younger than 20 years of age, who have completed their compulsory schooling but have not completed upper secondary school.

Upper secondary education is voluntary, but students are required to participate in the education. If a student in upper secondary school fails to attend the education for more than a month in succession, without a valid reason, the student shall be deemed to have left education. If there are special reasons, the principal may decide that the student should not be deemed to have left education, according to the Education Act.

As of July 1, 2018, the principal has an obligation to investigate repeated and longer periods of absence. The purpose for investigating the causes of absence is to be able to provide appropriate support, so that the student then can achieve the education goals. If there is a need for more ways of support, such as a need for special support or offensive treatment, these needs should be coordinated in one investigation.

When it comes to early leavers from education who have left education, the responsibility goes to
home municipality. The municipality must offer appropriate individual measures, primarily aimed at motivating young people to begin or resume upper secondary education. Municipalities are obliged to keep records of early school leavers and to document the efforts taken.

**Formal education: main policy measures on ELET**

**Upper secondary education**

The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has several on-going efforts to develop the quality of formal education and vocational education and training (yrkesprogram). The tasks and activities that are of particular interest for ELET are the following:

*Collaboration for the best school* (Samverkan för bästa skola) is a measure where the National Agency for Education together with principals implement actions to improve school results and equity within and between schools. Efforts are directed to schools with low level of academic achievement or high proportion of early leavers, and who have or are expected to have difficulties to improve their performance on their own. At the end of 2019, the National Agency calculates that the Collaboration for the best school has reached a total of approximately 110 principals and nearly 300 school units. Of the 32 school units that are currently active in the programme, five are upper secondary schools and the majority are thus compulsory schools.

*Mission to implement measures to improve the quality of education for newly arrived students and the needs of pupils with mother tongue other than Swedish* (Insatser för att stärka utbildningens kvalitet för nyanlända elever och vid behov för elever med annat modersmål än svenska) consist of both general and targeted measures. The general measures are directed to principals, headmasters, teachers, tutors in native language and other personnel in the introductory programme. The aim is to help reduce gaps in academic achievement between newly arrived students, students with a first language other than Swedish and other student groups.

*The national school development programme* (Nationella skolutvecklingsprogram) is a national school development programme targeted at principals and schools. Several of the planned measures are of importance for preventing early leaving from upper secondary schools.

*Training for guidance counselors to improve the quality of guidance* (Uppdrag att genomföra Fortbildningsinsatser för främst studie- och yrkesvägledare för att förbättra kvaliteten inom vägledningen) is a training package focusing on better knowledge of working life, contacts between school and work, and on how to integrate guidance and counselling in education.

**Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work**

In recent years, there are no government initiatives for actions aiming at preventing and reducing ELET through non-formal or informal learning or youth work.

**Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions**

In Sweden, the main focus when it comes to early leavers from upper secondary education is to get them back to education. If that doesn't work the focus is on alternative ways to training or
employment (see section 3.6 [7] for more information on integration of young people in the labour market in Sweden. The government formed a delegation in 2015, tasked with promoting labour market policies against youth unemployment at local level. The mission of the Delegation for the Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua [8]), is to promote state and municipal cooperation and development of new forms of cooperation. The work is to be based on both existing labour market policies and additional initiatives in the field of labour market policy.

Within its overarching mandate, Dua’s tasks include encouraging municipalities and the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen) to enter into collaborative agreements at local level and to put the agreements into practice. Dua is also to allocate government grants to municipalities linked to these local agreements.

Dua’s mandate includes conducting dialogue with and encouraging dialogue between individual municipalities, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), the labour market partners in the local government sphere (municipality and county council level), other central labour market partners, agencies, regional actors and others on how labour market policy initiatives to benefit young people and newly arrived migrants can be developed and made more effective at local level.

Dua is also to gather and spread knowledge about and best practice on labour market policy initiatives and forms of collaboration, and identify obstacles, problems and shortcomings in cooperation between the government and municipalities when implementing labour market policy. In its work, Dua is to pay particular attention to the importance of gender equality at work and seize opportunities to combat gender segregation in the labour market.

The national Youth Guarantee scheme

In December 2007, the labour market policy programme ‘Job guarantee for youth’ was introduced in Sweden. The purpose of the Job guarantee for youth is to offer young people individual employment measures at an early stage, in order for them to get a job or begin or resume education as quickly as possible. When it comes to young early leavers from education (between 16 and 19 years of age), the measures aim to bring them back to education. The municipalities must offer appropriate individual measures, primarily aimed at motivating these young people to begin or resume upper secondary school education.

Early leavers from education between 20 and 24 years of age, and who lack completed upper secondary education are entitled to study in adult education (Komvux) or in a folk high school (folkhögskola), with the goal of completing upper secondary education. Folk high school is an important second chance institute for those who have not been able to complete their education in the regular education system. With its unique pedagogy and its flexible conditions, folk high school succeeds to educate individuals that other school forms fail with. Therefore, the government provided in 2017 [9] extra funding for expanded opportunities for people without primary or secondary education to complete their education, or to attend a vocational education.

Further, participants in the Job guarantee for youth who have reached the age of 20 years are entitled to take part in the guarantee on a part-time basis, allowing them time to participate in municipal adult education courses or study Swedish for Immigrants. The aim is to increase their study motivation, clarify the role of education in the labour market and encourage more participants to choose full time studies.
Multi-agency partnerships addressing ELET

Sweden's largest collaborative project in preventing early school leaving at upper secondary level is Plug In [10]. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting) is the central project owner. The aim is to help reduce the dropout rate in upper secondary school and to get more young people to complete their studies.

The first round of the project took place between 2012 and 2014. The continuation, Plug In 2.0, started at the beginning of the autumn term 2015. It is expected that the project will reach about 3,000 young adults spread over some 40 municipalities during the project period. The initiative has been awarded support from the European Social Fund.

PlugInnovation.se [11] is a digital platform focusing on the school dropout issue. The platform provides information about developments and research in this field, for instance how municipalities are working to reduce truancy, to find more effective study plans for young newly arrived migrants and to support young people who have dropped out.

The Flagship project School to Work [12] (S2W) aims to strengthen transnational cooperation between stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region. Flagship School to Work is a platform that represents projects in the fields of education and employment that aim to prevent early school leaving and to integrate young people who are not in education, employment or training into labour market. A strong emphasis is on initiatives that provide holistic measures to ease school to work transition and to increase employability of young people.

Initiator of this project is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. School to Work gathers more than 50 members, who since 2012 are actively engaged in prevention of early school leaving and in easing transition from school to work. Members of the School to Work project are schools, civil society organisations, municipalities, public employment services, welfare institutions, businesses, academia, and government institutions (regional and national). Membership covers the entire territory of the Baltic Sea Region.

Quality assurance

The first step to assure the quality of the government measures to prevent early leaving from education was taken in 2013, when the Government commissioned Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån) to propose various options for following up young people who did not finish upper secondary education. In 2014, Statistics Sweden received a supplementary government mission to carry out a follow-up of the establishment process in the labour market of this group.

The follow-up [13] shows the extent to which young people born 1991-1995 entered upper secondary education and the results they achieved in the form of a school-leaving certificate, alternatively the highest grade in which they were registered. The report presented the extent to which they were established in the labour market, and the extent to which they studied at upper secondary level, in municipal adult education or took general courses at the folk high school.

The follow-up was based on a number of background variables. In addition, the young people's own perspective was presented. Their views on the reasons for never registering in upper secondary school or not completing upper secondary education was reviewed, as well as their impressions of
receiving support to complete upper secondary education. Also, their views on the contacts with study and vocational guidance were reported.

Evaluation of the national strategy

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen) has been commissioned by the Government, as a measure of the national strategy for young people who neither work nor study, to review the work of the municipalities within their responsibility for early leavers from education. See section 4.3 [14], Strategy for the social inclusion of young people, for more information about the strategy.

The Schools Inspectorate has during 2016 reviewed 16 municipalities [15] on the basis of amendments in the Education Act that went into effect in January 2015. The municipalities were chosen because of a high proportion of early leavers from upper secondary school. The target group consisted of a total of 695 early leavers. Among other facts the results show that only in 190 cases the young person was a subject of an intervention. The Schools Inspectorate concludes that the Swedish municipalities have started to develop individual-based methods but that much work remains in relation to the intentions of the legislation.