National strategies to tackle absenteeism and early leaving from education and training

A short paper based on Eurydice's System-level indicators on early leaving from education and training 2024/2025

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This paper presents key insights from the annually updated Eurydice system-level indicators on early leaving from education and training (ELET). These indicators monitor national actions to address absenteeism, reduce ELET, and support young people in completing upper secondary education across Europe. The focus is on policies aimed at achieving the EU-level target of reducing the share of early leavers to below 9% by 2030. The indicators highlight the existence of top-level policies and measures – such as regulations, recommendations and measures – promoted by authorities in 37 education systems ([1]). The scope is limited to school education, specifically primary and secondary levels.

Introduction

Absenteeism is a pressing concern in schools, with significant consequences for students, teachers, and education systems as a whole. When left unaddressed, chronic absenteeism can trigger a downward spiral of negative outcomes, including academic underachievement, social isolation, an increased risk of early leaving from education and training (ELET), and long-term effects such as reduced career opportunities, lower earning potential, and decreased social mobility. ([2])

Although it is difficult to compare data on absenteeism across countries due to variations in how school attendance issues are recorded and reported, it remains a growing concern in Europe and beyond. ([3]) In the absence of comparable absenteeism data, Eurostat figures on ELET offer valuable insights, showing an EU average of 9.4% in 2024. Disadvantaged groups – including young people in rural areas, those with a migration background, and those with disabilities – are disproportionately affected. ([4]) The European Education Area (EEA) strategic framework prioritises the creation of a collaborative and inclusive European education and training space, with reducing ELET as one key objective. Given the strong link between absenteeism and ELET, addressing absenteeism is essential to achieving the EEA's goals.

([1])   All EU Member States, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye

([2])   Kozina, A., 2025. *Pathways of absenteeism and early leaving from education and training.* ENESET ad hoc report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi: 10.2766/3898639

([3])   Kreitz-Sandberg, S., Fredriksson, U., 2023. Comparative Perspectives on School Attendance, Absenteeism, and Preventive Measures in Europe and Beyond. *European Education, 55*(3–4), 137–147

([4])   See: https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/en/

Key policies and measures to tackle absenteeism and foster engagement

Reducing absenteeism and preventing ELET require a strategic combination of early intervention, tailored support, and strengthened teacher capacity. The following actions – illustrated and described below – highlight key policies and measures identified by research as effective in addressing these challenges and promoting student engagement:

Early warning systems to prevent ELET

Targeted actions to address student absenteeism
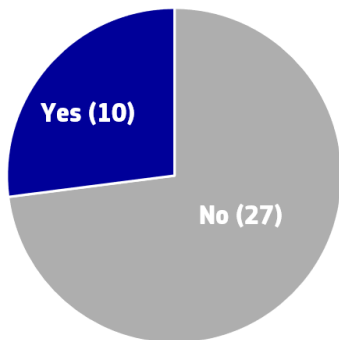
Individual education plans for at-risk students

Strengthening teacher competences to prevent ELET

Early warning systems to prevent ELET

Early warning systems that systematically and comprehensively monitor student data – including absenteeism, low performance, and early signs of disengagement – support schools and education authorities in tracking absenteeism and ELET across governance levels and in designing timely, targeted policy responses.

Ten European education systems ([5]) have implemented early warning systems to monitor student attendance and performance and prevent disengagement, while four others ([6]) are in the process of developing similar systems.

These systems often use real-time data collection to enable timely interventions and enhance transparency and communication among schools, administrators, teachers, and parents.

> **Poland**'s Ministry of National Education manages the School Education Information System (SIO), which centralises data on enrolment, attendance, and performance. It supports the early identification of at-risk students, tracks interventions and progress, and facilitates data sharing among stakeholders to inform policies and strategies on ELET.

As most education systems still lack an early warning system, expanding their availability across Europe could support more timely, targeted interventions for students at risk.
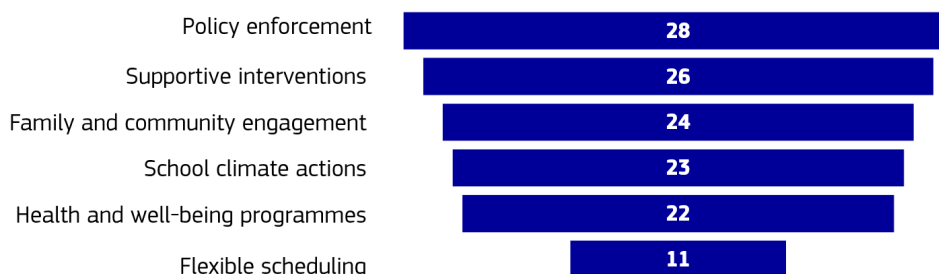
Education systems with early warning systems for preventing ELET

Yes (10)

No (27)

([5])   Bulgaria, France, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Montenegro and Türkiye

([6])   Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal and Slovakia

Targeted actions to address student absenteeism

Key actions to address absenteeism combine preventive, supportive, and corrective strategies to enable timely interventions that reduce disengagement and prevent ELET.

Education systems with top-level policies and measures on absenteeism

Measure	Value
Policy enforcement	28
Supportive interventions	26
Family and community engagement	24
School climate actions	23
Health and well-being programmes	22
Flexible scheduling	11

The most widely promoted measure across European education systems to tackle absenteeism is the establishment of clear attendance policies. These policies should be supported by consistent and equitable implementation that balances accountability with appropriate support.

Sixteen education systems (7) promote at least five of the listed measures to tackle absenteeism, combining targeted student support, family and community engagement, initiatives to strengthen school climate and well-being, and clear attendance policies to encourage regular participation.

A key area for further policy development is flexible scheduling, which remains notably lacking in many education systems. This includes offering flexible timetables or alternative learning arrangements – such as online or blended learning – to accommodate students facing barriers related to health, caregiving responsibilities, or other personal circumstances.

The **Swedish** National Agency for Education promotes a range of actions to improve school attendance and prevent absenteeism, including family and community engagement by informing guardians about attendance and maintaining contact via email or SMS. Early cooperation with healthcare and social services supports at-risk students, while counselling, mentoring, and SEN support address individual needs. Moreover, flexible scheduling enables tailored learning, and 'School Social Teams', which bring together school staff and social services, enhance safety and attendance. Health and well-being programmes include student consultations to understand absenteeism, with a strong emphasis on early intervention and well-being support.
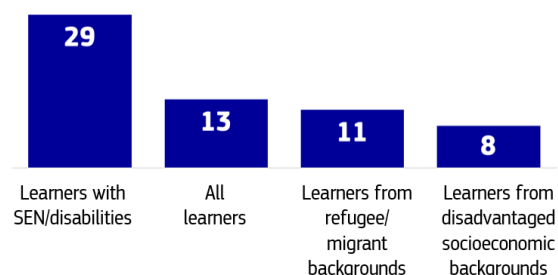
Individual education plans for at–risk students

Individualised education plans for learners at risk of ELET support engagement, progress, and inclusion while addressing complex personal and social challenges. Traditionally designed for learners with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, these plans can also be adapted for any student requiring additional support.

By offering a personalised and comprehensive learning support framework, individual education plans help ensure continuity in learning and development and play a critical role in reducing the risk of ELET.

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(7)   German-speaking and Flemish Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Finland and Sweden

Education systems targeting learner groups in top-level policies on individual education plans

29	13	11	8
Learners with SEN/disabilities	All learners	Learners from refugee/ migrant backgrounds	Learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds

Twenty–nine education systems have policies on individual education plans targeting learners with SEN or disabilities.

Only about one third of education systems ([8]) promote policies that support the use of individual education plans for all learners requiring additional support. This is closely followed by education systems that have policies specifically targeting learners from refugee or migrant backgrounds.
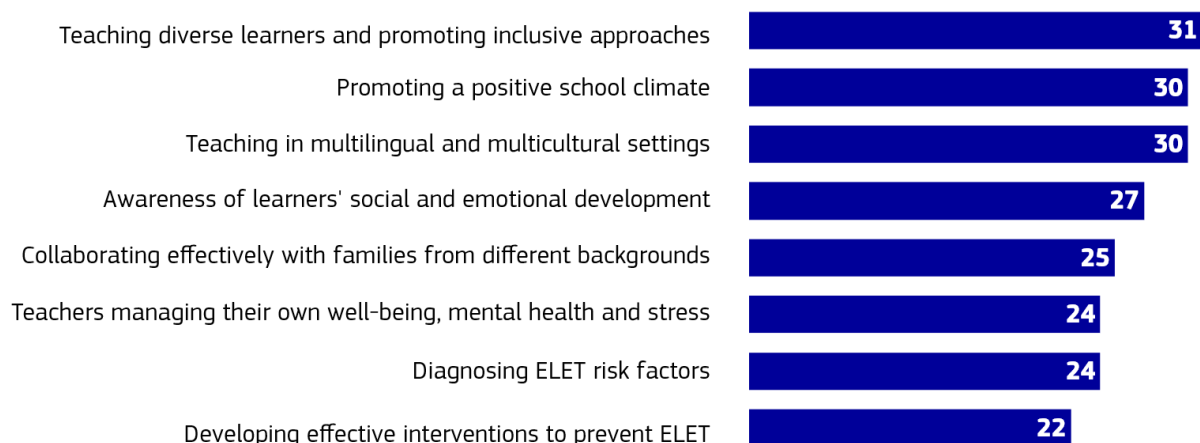
In the **French Community of Belgium**, two schemes provide personalised support for different student groups. The DAccE (Dossier d'Accompagnement de l'Élève) monitors and supports all students from pre-primary to secondary school, addressing learning difficulties early with input from teachers, professionals, and parents. The PIA (Projet Individualisé d'Accompagnement) targets students with SEN or disabilities, outlining the educational, therapeutic, and social support required and guiding implementation by school and therapy teams.

Learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are targeted in the fewest education systems, highlighting an area where improvements could help ensure they receive appropriate individualised support.

Strengthening teacher competences to prevent ELET

Focused education and training opportunities enable teachers to identify and address ELET risks and foster engaging, positive learning environments. Ongoing professional development also empowers teachers to respond effectively to diverse student needs and develop inclusive practices that support long-term retention and success.

Education systems promoting teacher competences to prevent ELET through CPD programmes

Teaching diverse learners and promoting inclusive approaches	31
Promoting a positive school climate	30
Teaching in multilingual and multicultural settings	30
Awareness of learners' social and emotional development	27
Collaborating effectively with families from different backgrounds	25
Teachers managing their own well-being, mental health and stress	24
Diagnosing ELET risk factors	24
Developing effective interventions to prevent ELET	22

([8])   French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Norway

Many education systems offer CPD programmes for teachers on ELET-related topics, primarily focusing on prevention through inclusive teaching, fostering a positive school climate, promoting effective teaching in multilingual and culturally diverse classrooms, and supporting learners' social and emotional well-being.

More than half of the systems also provide training to strengthen teachers' collaboration with families from diverse backgrounds and to support teachers' mental health, well-being, and stress management.

Specific training on targeted ELET interventions is less commonly promoted across Europe.

Estonia's Occupational Qualification Standards for Teachers define competences for preventing ELET. Through teacher education and training, teachers learn to identify at-risk students, assess their individual support needs, and collaborate with specialists to design tailored learning plans, including for students with diverse or special needs. Training also emphasises creating a positive and inclusive school climate, using multilingual and multicultural teaching approaches, and addressing students' social and emotional development. Teachers are encouraged to engage parents in the educational process and to manage their own well-being, ensuring they are equipped to support all students and effectively prevent ELET.

Conclusion

Breaking the cycle of absenteeism requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes of disengagement and provides students with the support and resources they need to succeed. By identifying students at risk of absenteeism through early warning systems, providing individualised education plans and support to address their unique needs, and empowering teachers to foster student engagement and sustained participation in education, education systems can reduce absenteeism, promote student success, and prevent educational disengagement and ELET.

For young people who drop out of school, policies and measures can be implemented to identify, support, and reintegrate them into education and training pathways, including through targeted outreach, individualised support, and community engagement.

To support these efforts, the Eurydice system-level indicators on ELET offer a systematic framework for monitoring of policies and measures aimed at preventing and addressing learners' disengagement. Updated annually, they provide regular insights into policy developments across education systems over time.