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**Expert Group meeting on International economic  
and social classifications  
New York, 18-20 May 2011**

## **ISCED 2011: Current Status and next steps**

UNESCO Institute for Statistics

## Background

Work on the latest revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was mandated in a resolution of the thirty-fourth General Conference of UNESCO Member States in November 2007.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) was charged with leading this review working in close collaboration with relevant international organizations including, in particular, its education data collection partners OECD and Eurostat.

A Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) of 15 education and statistics experts from across the world<sup>1</sup> including representatives of key international organizations<sup>2</sup> was established to guide the review strategy and take part in the development of detailed proposals for the revision. The TAP met 5 times between January 2009 and February 2011. The scope of the current revision was determined based on the advice of the TAP taking account of the timetable for adoption of the revision established by the General Conference resolution in 2007.

During 2009 detailed proposals for the revision were reviewed by the TAP and were discussed in separate regional meetings of experts from the Arab States, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Discussions also took place on the proposals with national experts attending meetings on education statistics held by Eurostat and OECD in both 2009 and 2010 and at international and regional conferences including UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education in July 2009. In addition, initial proposals were presented and discussed with the United Nations Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications at its last meeting in September 2009.

The initial proposals were revised in the light of feedback from the regional and international experts consulted and a global consultation of the draft ISCED 2011 text was launched in July 2010.

All Member States of UNESCO – both Ministries of Education and, with the assistance of the UN Statistical Division, all National Statistical Offices – were invited to comment. In addition the proposals were sent to members of the UN's Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications, members of the ISCED Technical Advisory Panel, national and regional experts who were invited to the regional meetings on ISCED in 2009 and 2010, relevant international agencies and national contacts responsible for submitting data on education, literacy or educational attainment to the UIS or its education data collection partners OECD and Eurostat.

Over 110 responses were received from more than 80 countries including 4 from members of the Expert Group. The responses were largely supportive of the revision. (Around 20 had no comments or fully supported the proposals. None rejected the revision.) Around 90 made substantive comments and suggestions which were reviewed by the Editorial Subgroup of the TAP at a meeting in December 2010 and by the full TAP at its final meeting in February and the draft text has been revised accordingly. (A final version of the text in English will be available to the Expert Group in the second week of May 2011 just before its meeting on 18-20 May 2011.)

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the TAP are from Africa, the Arab States, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America. 60% (of the original TAP) are from developing countries.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, OECD, UNESCO, UIS and UNICEF.

## **Summary of main changes compared to ISCED 1997**

The final ISCED 2011 text includes a correspondence table between ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011 but the main changes are summarised below. These changes take account of modifications to the original proposals as the result of advice and comments received during the global consultation:

- An extension and renaming of the lowest level of education (early childhood education or ISCED 0) to include educational programmes for very young children (typically aged 0-2 years) but as a separate sub-category entitled early childhood educational development (to allow for continuity of time series of statistics on pre-primary education)
- More extensive definitions of the types of education – in particular formal and non-formal education – to allow for a more precise definition of the coverage of education within ISCED
- A simplification of programme orientation from 3 to 2 categories (general and vocational)
- The introduction of new concepts of (successful) completion of ISCED levels - with or without access to higher levels of education which replaces the ISCED 1997 concept of programme destination and better distinguishes between completion and non-completion of ISCED levels
- At ISCED levels 2 and 3 (lower and upper secondary) the concept of partial completion of level has been introduced in addition (to cater for cases where two or more programmes form a sequence within the ISCED level – a phenomenon which is relatively common at these levels and causes some problems of comparability across countries)
- The classification of educational attainment (as well as educational programmes) within ISCED
- A redefinition of education at the tertiary level taking account of changes across the world at this level since 1997. The revision includes 4 levels of tertiary education: short cycle tertiary; Bachelor's level and equivalent degrees; Master's level and equivalent and Doctorate level.
- New coding systems both for educational programmes and for educational attainment.
- A new governance procedure for ensuring the effective adoption and implementation of the new ISCED.
- A core glossary (of around 70 terms) with a more extensive on-line glossary planned following the adoption of ISCED 2011

The final ISCED 2011 text will be submitted to the 187<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board of UNESCO in September 2011 (where it will be considered by the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations) and, if approved, to the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference for adoption by the Member States of UNESCO in November 2011.

We plan to make the text available to countries in advance of these meetings so that the national experts can adequately brief their countries' delegates who will attend these meetings. In order to achieve this we propose (in addition to presenting specific papers at the two meetings) posting the final text on the UIS Website from late May onwards as the respective language versions become available and informing those invited to participate in the global consultation last year. The ISCED will be available in all six official UN languages with final language versions expected to be posted no later than the end of July 2011.

## **Next steps**

It is currently expected that the first international data collections based on the new ISCED will begin in 2013 or, more likely, 2014 although final decisions will be taken as we gather more information from countries on the expected impact on their existing data collection mechanisms. The implementation of the new ISCED in household surveys and censuses may not occur until 2015 (depending partly on cycles for revision of such surveys and national or regional priorities for education questions within such surveys).

Nevertheless, UIS has already started working with countries - in particular via regional workshops and similar events - to explain the current revision and to gather information to assist in the reclassification of programmes to the new ISCED. In addition to headquarter staff working with countries, the UIS has a network of statistical advisors based in the field covering Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa which will also provide advice to countries including, where appropriate, on an individual or small group basis. OECD and Eurostat have similar plans for their member states (in which UIS is also participating). This work will intensify later in 2011 and beyond.

From mid-2011 work will begin on an Operational Manual to support the implementation of ISCED including more detailed advice to countries and national examples which will be ready in early 2012 shortly after the adoption of ISCED 2011. Additional training materials will also be developed in collaboration with our partners and disseminated electronically via the UIS website or by other means as appropriate.

The new governance procedures also envisage the possibility of conducting peer reviews of countries' mappings of national programmes and qualifications to ISCED 2011. We expect the first of these to take place in 2012. Approved mappings will be published on the UIS's website (as they are now for mappings of programmes to ISCED 1997 for many countries). Ultimately all countries will be expected to produce ISCED mappings (at least of formal educational programmes and qualifications).

Following adoption, an ISCED Committee will be formed in order to advise UIS regarding the classification of national programmes and qualifications, to review the ISCED and its implementation and to identify potential areas for further development. The Committee will consist of UNESCO (as lead agency within the UN system of organizations), custodians of other related classifications as appropriate, and key education data collection partners, such as OECD and Eurostat, as permanent members. The composition of the Committee membership should aim to be balanced both technically and geographically, and therefore would include in addition a number of educational, statistical and classification experts with knowledge of ISCED and representing different regions of the world on a non-permanent basis as well as representatives from the research and user community.

### **Other activities**

The current revision of ISCED did not cover the fields of education and training. We plan to begin a revision of the fields later this year with a view to adopting a new classification in 2013 (following a global consultation in 2012). The revision will build upon a three-digit classification developed by Statistics Sweden for the UIS in 1999 (which was never adopted by UNESCO but has been used by both Eurostat and OECD since 1999). Eurostat is consulting its Member States on possible revisions to the classification they have been using and expects feedback in the next month or two. The revision of the ISCED fields will take account of Eurostat's proposals but will also seek to meet the needs of a wide range of countries across the world. UIS expects to create a Technical Advisory Panel for this revision in 2011 and to undertake consultations globally during 2012 on the proposals with a view to adoption in 2013 (at the following UNESCO General Conference). Once adopted, we plan to establish the fields of education and training as a classification independent from (though related to) ISCED.

### **Conclusions**

The Expert Group may wish to comment on the content of this note and to provide advice on the implementation of ISCED 2011 following its adoption and other proposed activities.