



# **Review of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 97)**

## **Basic Education and the review of the ISCED<sup>1</sup>**

### **Proposal for initial discussion in the ISCED regional expert meetings**

Draft Version October 2009

[Doc: RM\_ISCED\_Basic Education]

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<sup>1</sup> This note was prepared based on submissions from Anand Srivastava and Massimo Amadio, TAP members. A preliminary version was written by Nhung Truong, statistical assistant at UIS.

## Basic Education and the review of the ISCED

### Rationale

The ISCED Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) recommended including examining basic education as part of the review of ISCED.

The TAP considered that this review was necessary to respond to changes in the educational systems in the last two decades resulting from the promotion of basic education programmes and policies around the world.

The term basic education is widely used to denote the type of education that is considered necessary for attainment of minimum knowledge, skills and values that a person in any society needs. Its importance began to be recognized in the context of national development, economic growth, increase in productivity in farming and other sectors, reduction of infant and child mortality, individual social advancement and overall improvement of an individual's quality of life. This was reflected in the proclamation of 'Education for All' (EFA) UNESCO conference held at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. Within the framework of the basic learning needs approach at the core of the EFA movement, the strengthening and broadening of basic education is part of the expanded vision that aimed at meeting the international goals of Education for All.

It originally covered the **national** primary education cycle and also parallel complementary provision in the form of non-formal education for those who for some reason could not complete the primary cycle. But gradually its scope extended to other upper education levels, such as secondary school and, also towards including part or all of pre-primary school.<sup>2</sup>

In **ISCED terms**, this would mean that basic education, as nationally defined, may be present in educational programmes classified in ISCED level 0 (label: pre-primary education) or ISCED level 3 (label: Upper Secondary).

Likewise, as countries implement basic education policies, it may mean a more integrated view of education where the boundaries between the different stages (pre-primary, primary, secondary) becomes less evident. This will also impact in the current criteria distinguishing ISCED 0, 1 and 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of these are: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ecuador, Guinea, Macao (SAR of China), Mexico, Myanmar, Niger, Panama, Peru, Thailand, Zimbabwe. *Basic Education Database provided by Massimo Amadio, International Bureau of Education (IBE), 2007.*

## Reviewing the notion of basic education in ISCED

The discussion of how to approach basic education in ISCED needs to identify elements that will help in ensuring international comparability of education statistics.

The notion of basic education is present in the ISCED classification as follows:

- in the label for ISCED 1 (Primary school or **First stage of basic education**)
- in the label for ISCED 2 (Lower secondary or **Second Stage of basic education**)
- In ISCED 1 paragraph 49: In countries where primary education is part of ‘basic education’, only the first stage should be included in level 1. If ‘basic education’ is not officially divided into stages, only the first six years should be classified as level 1.

Basic education has 3 aspects that link it to the ISCED review:

- a) To re-assess its use in the labels of ISCED 1 and 2
- b) To aim for including an international definition of basic education in the ISCED glossary
- c) Provide guidelines to improve the classification of basic education programmes in ISCED (implementation guide to be prepared at a later stage – the mappings are solving many classification problems)

### a) Basic education as label in ISCED 1 and ISCED 2

Within ISCED, educational programmes covering ISCED levels 1 and 2 are referred to as first and second stages of basic education, respectively. The names for the two stages of basic education within ISCED, in the six United Nations languages, are presented in the table below.

#### ISCED 1997 names for basic education

English	First stage of basic education	Second stage of basic education
French	Premier cycle de l'éducation de base	Deuxième cycle de l'éducation de base
Spanish	Primer ciclo de la educación básica	Segundo ciclo de educación básica
Arabic	المرحلة الأولى من التعليم الأساسي	المرحلة الثانية من التعليم الأساسي
Chinese	基础教育第一阶段。	基础教育第二阶段。
Russian	Первый этап базового образования	Второй этап базового образования

Source: ISCED 1997 (UNESCO, 2006)

While ISCED is the tool through which national structures are made internationally comparable, experience applying ISCED over the years is showing that the current naming of the ISCED levels 1 and 2 may be reconsidered and, even its name removed from them, in order to solve

confusions originating on the fact that basic education is being extended towards programmes in ISCED 0 or ISCED 3 as well.

Careful consideration should be given to the fact that The Dakar Framework for action refers to the provision of basic education and the improvement of its conditions as a means to achieving better educational quality and equity. Given that basic education policies will determine the content of educational programmes and possibly changes in the structure of education systems, perhaps this should still be reflected in ISCED. ISCED is the backbone of international comparable education statistics and is used in the monitoring of the Education for All goals.

If the notion of basic education is kept in any ISCED level label, a good communication effort is required to ensure that countries understand that the grades/years/stages included in basic education, from the national perspective, may be different from what is considered as basic education at the international level.

Appendix1 shows the programmes using the term ‘basic education’ in the national programme names.

*Discussion points for group work during the ISCED regional meetings:*

- *Should the notion of basic education still be present in ISCED 1 and 2? Why?*
- *Should the notion of basic education be reflected in ISCED? If yes, how? If not, why not?*

*Recommendations/Action points*

*Please include in this section 3-5 bullet points stating the conclusions of your group discussions. Include any action points for each bullet point as needed.*

Recommendations	Actions
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

## b) Definition

If the term basic education is mentioned in ISCED in any way, it should be added to the ISCED glossary. A potential quick survey is proposed in Appendix II. Its feasibility will be first discussed in the ISCED expert regional meetings.

Its rationale needs to be clear because “basic education” is more than “the content and the objectives” in which ISCED focuses for programme classification. Basic education is a move towards a more integral view of education, which may include pre-primary to secondary education programmes and may take place in formal and non-formal sectors.

*Discussion points for group work during the regional meetings will focus on the following:*

- *Why is an international definition of basic education important in relation to the comparability of education statistics?*
- *Do you know how is it defined in your country? – FOR FOLLOW UP AFTER THE MEETING IF NECESSARY..*
- *Please discuss the questions proposed in the Quick Survey in appendix II and make any necessary suggestions.*

### *Recommendations/Action points*

*Please include in this section 3-5 bullet points stating the conclusions of your group discussions. Include any action points for each bullet point as needed.*

Recommendations	Actions
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

## Appendix 1: Programmes using the term "basic education" in the UIS ISCED database

Region	Country	Programme Name	Duration		
			ISC1	ISC2	BED
Arab States	Djibouti	enseignement fondamental	6	4	10
	Lebanon	enseignement principale	6	3	9
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*	basic education	6	3	9
	Palestine*	lower/higher basic	4	6	10
	Sudan	basic education	6	2	8
	Yemen	basic education	6	3	9
Central Asia	Armenia	basic general education	4	5	9
	Georgia	basic education (starts at age 12; requirement: primary education)	na	3	3
	Kazakhstan*	basic general education	4	5	9
	Kyrgystan*	basic general education	4	5	9
	Tajikistan*	basic general education	4	5	9
Central & Eastern Europe	Belarus*	basic general education	4	5	9
	Republic of Moldova	general basic education	4	5	9
Latin America and the Caribbean	Bolivia*	ciclo de aprendizajes básicos (starts at age 6)	3	na	3
	Costa Rica	educación general básica I y II, y III ciclos	6	3	9
	Cuba	educación secundaria básica (starts at age 12; requirement: graduado de 6°)	na	3	3
	Dominican Republic	nivel básico primer y segundo ciclo (4+4 national)	6	2	8
	El Salvador	educación básica I y II, y III ciclos	6	3	9
	Guatemala	ciclo básico (starts at age 13; requirement: certificado y diploma de sexton grado de primaria)	na	3	3
	Haiti	enseignement fondamental 1e et 2e et 3e cycles	4+2	3	9
	Honduras	educación básica: 3 ciclos	6	3	9
	Panama	educación básica general: nivel primario y nivel de premedia	6	3	9
	Venezuela*:	básica: 1° a 6 grado y 7° a 9 grado/ educación	6	3	9
Sub-Saharan Africa	Cap Vert	enseignement de base (starts at age 6)	6	na	6
	Central African Republic	enseignement fondamental 1 et 2	6	4	10
	Guinea Bissau*	enseignement de base élémentaire et complémentaire (starts at age 7)	4+2	na	6
	Madagascar*	éducation fondamentale du 1e et 2e cycle	5	4	9
	Mali	fondamental premier et deuxième cycles	6	3	9
	Namibia	primary basic education (starts at age 7)	7	na	7
	Niger	enseignement de base, cycle 1 et 2	6	4	10
	Sierra Leone	basic education	6	3	9
	Zambia	basic education (lower (4) + middle (3) + upper (2))	7	2	9

Source: UIS database, 2007-2008 as of September, 2009

\* Mappings not yet on the web

## **Appendix II. Quick Survey on ISCED 1997 and ‘Basic Education’**

Over the last decade, many countries have decided to adopt the term ‘basic education’ for one or several pre-existing educational programmes, typically referring to the former primary and lower secondary education programmes as ‘basic education’.

If your country has officially adopted a ‘basic education’ programme, please consider the questions below (referring to the formal education system):

**C.1 What is the national definition of basic education, if any?**

**C.2 What is the general goal of basic education?**

**C.3 Is the basic education programme compulsory and free?**

**C.4 How many years of schooling are covered by basic education?**

**C.5. What ISCED levels are currently included under basic education? (For example, primary education or ISCED level 1 only; primary and lower secondary education, or ISCED levels 1 and 2; etc.)**

**C.6 Is basic education officially divided into stages/cycles?**

*If yes,*

**C.6.1 How many stages/cycles are contemplated and how many years of schooling are included in each of them?**

**C.6.2 What is the official definition of a ‘stage’ or ‘cycle’ of basic education, if any?**

**C.6.4 Are the different stages/cycles of basic education offered in the same institution or in different types of school?**