

Reader's Guide

This section introduces some of the terminology used in this publication, and explains how readers can use the links provided to get further information.

Levels of education

Education systems vary considerably from country to country, including the ages at which students typically begin and end each phase of schooling, the duration of courses, and what students are taught and expected to learn. These variations greatly complicate the compilation of internationally comparable statistics on education. In response, the United Nations created an International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which provides a basis for comparing different education systems and a standard terminology.

The table below introduces this system of classification and explains what is meant by each level of education. Readers should note that this publication uses slightly simplified terminology, which differs from that used in both the ISCED classification and in *Education at a Glance 2011*. The table shows the equivalent terms in the two publications, the ISCED classifications, and definitions of what it all means.

Term used to describe levels of education in <i>Education at a Glance 2011</i> <i>ISCED classification (and subcategories)</i>	Term generally used in this publication
Pre-primary education <i>ISCED 0</i>	Pre-primary education The first stage of organised instruction designed to introduce very young children to the school atmosphere. Minimum entry age of 3.
Primary education <i>ISCED 1</i>	Primary education Designed to provide a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics and a basic understanding of some other subjects. Entry age: between 5 and 7. Duration: 6 years.
Lower secondary education <i>ISCED 2 (subcategories: 2A prepares students for continuing academic education, leading to 3A; 2B has stronger vocational focus, leading to 3B; 2C offers preparation for entering workforce)</i>	Lower secondary education Completes provision of basic education, usually in a more subject-oriented way with more specialist teachers. Entry follows 6 years of primary education; duration is 3 years. In some countries, the end of this level marks the end of compulsory education.
Upper secondary education <i>ISCED 3 (subcategories: 3A prepares students for university-level education at level 5A; 3B for entry to vocationally oriented tertiary education at level 5B; 3C prepares students for workforce or for post-secondary non-tertiary education, ISCED 4)</i>	Upper secondary education Even stronger subject specialisation than at lower-secondary level, with teachers usually more qualified. Students typically expected to have completed 9 years of education or lower secondary schooling before entry and are generally around the age of 15 or 16.
Post-secondary non-tertiary education <i>ISCED 4 (subcategories: 4A may prepare students for entry to tertiary education, both university level and vocationally oriented education; 4B typically prepares students to enter the workforce)</i>	Post-secondary non-tertiary education Programmes at this level may be regarded nationally as part of upper secondary or post-secondary education, but in terms of international comparison their status is less clear cut. Programme content may not be much more advanced than in upper secondary, and is certainly lower than at tertiary level. Entry typically requires completion of an upper secondary programme. Duration usually equivalent to between 6 months and 2 years of full-time study.

Term used to describe levels of education in <i>Education at a Glance 2011</i> <i>ISCED classification (and subcategories)</i>	Term generally used in this publication
Tertiary education <i>ISCED 5 (subcategories 5A and 5B, see below)</i>	Tertiary education ISCED 5 is the first stage of tertiary education (the second – ISCED 6 – involves advanced research). At level 5, it is often more useful to distinguish between two subcategories: 5A, which represent longer and more theoretical programmes; and 5B, where programmes are shorter and more practically oriented. Note, though, that as tertiary education differs greatly between countries, the demarcation between these two subcategories is not always clear cut.
Tertiary-type A <i>ISCED 5A</i>	University-level education “Long-stream” programmes that are theory based and aimed at preparing students for further research or to give access to highly skilled professions, such as medicine or architecture. Entry preceded by 13 years of education, students typically required to have completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. Duration equivalent to at least 3 years of full-time study, but 4 is more usual.
Tertiary-type B <i>ISCED 5B</i>	Vocationally oriented tertiary education “Short-stream” programmes that are more practically oriented or focus on the skills needed for students to directly enter specific occupations. Entry preceded by 13 years of education; students may require mastery of specific subjects studied at levels 3B or 4A. Duration equivalent to at least 2 years of full-time study, but 3 is more usual.
Advanced research programmes <i>ISCED 6</i>	Advanced research programmes The second stage of tertiary education. Programmes are devoted to advanced study and original research.

For fuller definitions and explanations of the ISCED standard, please consult *Classifying Education Programmes: Manual for ISCED-97 Implementation in OECD Countries* (1999).

Country coverage

OECD and partner countries: The first four chapters of this publication feature data on education from the 34 OECD member countries, two non-OECD countries that participate in the OECD Indicators of Education Systems programme (INES), namely Brazil and the Russian Federation, and other G20 countries that do not participate in INES (Argentina, China, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa). The special section on PISA (Chapter 5) features data from the 34 OECD member countries and 42 partner countries and economies (see page 85 for the complete list).

Belgium: Data on Belgium may be applicable only to either the Flemish Community or the French Community. Where this is the case, the text and charts refer to Belgium (Fl) for the Flemish Community and Belgium (Fr) for the French Community.

EU21: These are the 21 OECD countries for which data are available or can be estimated that are members of the European Union: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

G20: These are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Notes to tables and charts

For further details on the data behind any figure, see the relevant indicator in the full publication *Education at a Glance 2011*, or click the hyperlink in the figure's source to download the data and notes.



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