



4

## Chapter 4

# ISCED 2011 level 2:

## Lower secondary education

Programmes at the lower secondary education level are designed to lay the foundation across a wide range of subjects and to prepare children and young people for more specialised study at upper secondary and higher levels of education. The beginning – or the end – of lower secondary education often involves a change of school for young students and also a change in the style of instruction.

Programmes classified at ISCED level 2 may be referred to in many ways, for example: secondary school (stage one/lower grades), junior secondary school, middle school or junior high school. If a programme spans ISCED levels 1 and 2, the terms elementary education or basic school (second stage/upper grades) are often used. For international comparability purposes, the term 'lower secondary education' is used to label ISCED level 2.



## DESCRIPTION

### Definition

(§139)<sup>1</sup> Programmes at ISCED level 2 – lower secondary education - are typically designed to build on the learning outcomes from ISCED level 1. Usually the aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development upon which education systems may then expand further educational opportunities. Some education systems may offer vocational education programmes at ISCED level 2 to provide individuals with skills relevant to employment.

(§140) Programmes at this level are usually organized around a more subject-oriented curriculum, introducing theoretical concepts across a broad range of subjects. Teachers typically have pedagogical training in specific subjects and, more often than at ISCED level 1, a class of students may have several teachers with specialised knowledge of the subjects they teach.

### Classification criteria (§143)

#### Main criteria

- a) Programme transition point to a more subject-oriented instruction

(§144) The boundary between ISCED level 1 and ISCED level 2 coincides with the transition point in the education system at which subject-oriented instruction is [first] emphasised.

- b) Entry requirements

(§145) This level requires the completion of ISCED level 1 or the ability to study ISCED level 2 content through a combination of prior education as well as life and work experiences. The successful completion of ISCED level 1 or a specific level of achievement may be required for entering some or all ISCED level 2 programmes.

- c) Cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1

(§146) ISCED level 2 ends after 8-11 years of education after the beginning of ISCED level 1.

#### Subsidiary criteria

- a) Typical entry age

(§141) ISCED level 2 begins after four to seven years of ISCED level 1 education. Students enter ISCED level 2 typically between ages 10 and 13.

- b) Teacher qualifications and organisation of instruction by subject teachers

(§147) The required teacher qualifications may be different at ISCED level 2 compared to ISCED level 1. Teachers at ISCED level 2 are often qualified in one or more specific subjects, as well as in pedagogy. In addition, the organization of instruction can differ from ISCED level 1 as there are more often several teachers for one class, who teach their respective field or fields of specialisation.

- c) Relationship with compulsory education

(§148) In many education systems with compulsory education legislation, the end of lower secondary education coincides with the end of compulsory (general) education.



## Complementary dimensions

(§152) Two dimensions differentiate programmes at ISCED level 2.

(§153) Programme orientation:

- General; and
- Vocational.

(§154) Level completion:

- *No completion of ISCED level 2*: short, terminal programmes (or sequence of programmes) with a duration of less than 2 years at ISCED level 2 or which end after less than 8 years of cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1.
- *Partial completion of ISCED level 2*: programmes representing at least 2 years at ISCED level 2 and a cumulative duration of at least 8 years since the beginning of ISCED level 1, and which are part of a sequence of programmes at ISCED level 3 but are not the last programme in the sequence.
- *Completion of ISCED level 2 without direct access to higher ISCED levels*: programmes with a duration of at least 2 years at ISCED level 2 and that end after at least 8 years cumulative duration since the beginning of ISCED level 1 but which do not give direct access to ISCED level 3.
- *Completion of ISCED level 2 with direct access to higher ISCED levels*: any programmes that give direct access to ISCED level 3 regardless of their duration at the level or their cumulative duration since the start of ISCED level 1.

## CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ISCED 2011 AND ISCED 1997

The coverage of ISCED level 2 is identical in the 1997 and 2011 revisions of ISCED.

The complementary dimensions for ISCED level 2 are different in the latest version of ISCED. (§278)

### a) Programme orientation

ISCED 1997 defines three types of orientation: general, pre-vocational and vocational. In ISCED 2011 there are only two orientations at ISCED level 2: general and vocational. Programmes previously classified as pre-vocational (in ISCED 1997) do not provide labour market-relevant qualifications and are now mainly classified as general education.

### b) Level completion and programme destination

ISCED 1997 classifies programmes according to the programmes and levels to which they were designed to lead (the programme destination). At ISCED level 2, three destinations were defined:

A = programmes giving access to upper secondary education at ISCED 1997 level 3A or 3B (i.e. programmes on a direct pathway to tertiary education);

B = programmes giving access to upper secondary education at ISCED 1997 level 3C but not to 3A or 3B (i.e. programmes on a pathway to post-secondary non-tertiary education only or to the labour market); and

C = programmes without direct access to upper secondary education (i.e. terminal programmes leading to the labour market).

ISCED 2011 classifies programmes according to the type of completion of the level and access to other programmes and levels. ISCED 1997 destinations A and B are combined into a single category in ISCED 2011: (full) completion of ISCED 2011 level 2 with direct access to upper secondary education. ISCED 1997 destination C is sub-divided into three categories in ISCED 2011:

- (full) completion of ISCED 2011 level 2 with no direct access to upper secondary education;
- partial completion of ISCED 2011 level 2 with no direct access to upper secondary education; and
- insufficient for level completion or partial level completion of ISCED 2011 level 2.



## GUIDELINES FOR CLASSIFYING PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS AT ISCED LEVEL 2

Programmes at lower secondary education are designed to lay the foundation across a wide range of subjects and to prepare children and young people for more specialised study at upper secondary and higher levels of education. The beginning – or the end – of lower secondary education often involves a change of school for young students and also a change in the style of instruction. Lower secondary programmes build on primary education and usually include lessons which are more subject-oriented than at the primary level. Typically all students follow the same curriculum and have few or no choices of the subjects to study. By the end of lower secondary education, young people are expected to have a solid foundation in the basic subjects (usually including reading and writing, mathematics, history, geography, science and often a second or foreign language; art, music and physical education may also be part of the curriculum).

In some education systems, programmes may be differentiated by orientation although this is more common at the upper secondary level.

Vocational programmes, where they exist at this level, generally offer options for young people wishing to prepare for direct entry to the labour market in low- or semi-skilled jobs (**Examples Group 1**). They may also be the first step of vocational education, giving access to more advanced vocational programmes at the upper secondary level (**Examples Group 2**).

However, in most education systems, the vast majority of students are enrolled in general programmes at the lower secondary level designed to lead to upper secondary education (**Examples Group 3**).

ISCED level 2 also includes adult education programmes which are similar in content to the education provided at this level (e.g. programmes which allow adults to acquire the basic skills necessary for further learning) and education programmes for individuals with special educational needs (e.g. disabilities, difficulties or disadvantages) (**Examples Group 4**).

Second chance or re-integration programmes which either review material already covered in lower secondary programmes or provide options for young people who might otherwise leave school with no qualifications also exist (**Examples Group 5**). They may also provide opportunities for young people to change streams or enter an occupation requiring a lower secondary-level qualification for which their existing studies did not qualify them. These programmes are classified at ISCED level 2 (§156).

Programmes also exist at this level aimed at the integration of migrants – both adult and youth (**Examples Group 6**).

In the past, the end of this level often coincided with the end of compulsory education, although today countries are increasingly extending compulsory education into the upper secondary level. Lower secondary programmes last between two and five years, with three years being the most common. Programmes at this level may be shorter than this in some countries where a sequence of programmes within the level may exist. Sequential programmes are less common at the lower secondary level than at upper secondary, but they may exist where a transfer between schools occurs during the level – for example where basic schools cover eight or more grades extending beyond the primary level.

### Programmes that span lower secondary education and another ISCED level

Special consideration is needed for programmes that span lower secondary education and the levels before or after. In these cases, only those grades, stages or cycles that correspond to the criteria for the respective levels (ISCED levels 1, 2 or 3) should be attributed to those levels. (§149)

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ISCED LEVEL 2

As with primary education, programmes at the lower secondary level do not always lead to a final recognised qualification – especially where lower and upper secondary education are offered in the same institution or where the end of lower secondary education does not coincide with the end of compulsory education. Where this is the case, other forms of **formal recognition** of successful completion of the programme or level may be used to determine the level of educational attainment. This may include formal confirmation of attendance during the full final year of the programme or the right to access higher programmes or levels.



For the purposes of measuring educational attainment, ISCED 2011 distinguishes between full and partial completion of lower secondary education, although partial level completion is rare at this level.

Programmes leading to full completion of lower secondary education are further sub-divided within ISCED into those which lead to upper secondary education and those which do not. Both give rise to attainment at the lower secondary-level. The latter group consists typically of vocational programmes often designed for students older than the theoretical age for lower secondary education.

Partial level completion has a very specific meaning and is not synonymous with either “incomplete studies” or “some study” at the level. A programme leading to partial level completion is one which results in a recognised qualification or other formal confirmation by the relevant national education authorities of the successful completion of the programme. The programme is one of a sequence of programmes within the ISCED level but is not the last programme in the sequence. The programme also has to represent a minimum of eight years of cumulative study since the start of primary education and at least two years of (cumulative) study within lower secondary education (**Examples Group 7**). Note that partial level completion is also different from the sub-category ‘no completion of the level’. The latter refers to programmes that do not meet the duration requirements for partial or full level completion and therefore result in educational attainment at the level below the level of the programme (see **Examples Group 8**).

Partial level completion at the lower secondary level most often occurs where there is a change of school during the level. As part of the transition process between schools, countries may have formal assessments or examinations of pupils’ progress leading to recognised successful completion of the given national programme of education.

(§159) For educational attainment, recognized qualifications from ISCED level 2 programmes which are not considered sufficient for completion or partial completion of ISCED level 2 are classified as ISCED level 1.

(§160) Similarly, recognized qualifications from ISCED level 3 programmes which are insufficient for consideration as completion or partial completion of ISCED level 3 are classified as ISCED level 2.

If the programme does not lead to any recognised qualifications (or if successful completion is not otherwise formally recognised by the relevant national authorities), the concept partial level completion does not apply. In such cases, educational attainment of ISCED level 2 can only be allocated at the end of the whole sequence of programmes when the corresponding qualification or formal confirmation of successful completion is obtained.

Programmes at ISCED level 2 that do not give direct access to ISCED 3 and that represent fewer years of study either since the start of primary education (i.e. less than eight) or within lower secondary education (i.e. less than two) or both are regarded as insufficient for either partial completion or full completion of lower secondary education, and result in educational attainment at the primary level (**Examples Group 8**).

Users of the classification who wish to disseminate results according to a simplified set of educational attainment categories than are acceptable in ISCED-A may need to decide how to treat partial level completion. Depending on the main purpose of the analyses to be made, two different approaches are possible:

- (i) Some users may want to know what percentage of the population of interest has successfully completed each ISCED level of education. To do this they would need to classify partial level completion at the level below the level of study (i.e. at primary level in the case of partial completion of lower secondary education).
- (ii) Other users may be interested to measure at least some recognised successful study at a given level – especially where this may represent an important transition point in the education system or first-time graduation within a given ISCED level. They would classify partial level completion at the same ISCED level as the level of study (i.e. at the lower secondary level in the case of partial completion of lower secondary education).

Both approaches are valid. It is for the user/analyst to decide which is the more appropriate for their circumstances. It is recommended that treatment of the partial completion applied in the calculation of indicators on educational attainment is indicated in metadata accompanying such statistics.



## EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS CLASSIFIED AT ISCED LEVEL 2

(§142) Programmes classified at ISCED level 2 may be referred to in many ways: *secondary school (stage one/lower grades)*, *junior secondary school*, *middle school* or *junior high school*. If a programme spans ISCED levels 1 and 2, the terms elementary education or basic school (second stage/upper grades) are often used. For international comparability purposes, the term 'lower secondary education' is used to label ISCED level 2.

### Examples Group 1:

**Vocational programmes designed for young people to prepare for direct entry to the labour market in low- or semi-skilled jobs [ISCED-P: 251 or 253; ISCED-A: 100 or 253]**

**Tunisia** – شهادة مهارة (Certificate of competency). Access to this programme requires the completion of Grade 7, which is the first grade of lower secondary education. It is a two-year vocational education programme leading to the *Certificat de Compétence* (certificate of competency), which provides access only to the labour market. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 253)

### Examples Group 2:

**Vocational programmes preparing for direct labour market entry but also providing access to upper secondary programmes [ISCED-P: 254; ISCED-A: 254]**

**Bulgaria** – *Profesionalni programi- parva stepen na profesionalna kvalifikatsiya sled 6 ili 7 klas* (Vocational programme for a first-level professional qualification after completion of Grade 6 or 7). Pupils enter this programme after completing two years at ISCED level 2. The programme is of two- to three-years' duration and leads to two qualifications: basic education attainment (giving access to ISCED level 3) and a first-level professional qualification. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 254)

**Lebanon** – الكفاءة المهنية (Vocational aptitude). This two-year vocational programme requires the completion of at least the first grade of lower secondary education. Upon successful completion, graduates are awarded شهادة الكفاءة المهنية (Certificate of vocational aptitude), which leads to the labour market in addition to higher levels of education. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 254)

**Netherlands** – *WEB-assistentenopleiding* (Vocational education: training to assistant level (level 1)). These are full-time or part-time school-based and dual-system education programmes designed for students aged 16 years and older. (Part-time programmes are only open to students aged 18 years and older.) Full-time programmes are typically one year in duration and lead to the *MBO niv. 1: assistent* (Certificate of secondary vocational education, assistant level). Successful completers may continue studies at the upper secondary level although most enter the labour market. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 254)

### Examples Group 3:

**General programmes giving access to upper secondary education [ISCED-P: 244; ISCED-A: 244]**

**Australia** – *Secondary school: 1st stage*. The first stage of secondary school lasts three or four years, depending on the length of primary school in the state concerned, and ends with the award of the Year 10 Certificate. Students follow a general school programme, offering the opportunity for further academic progression. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

**Egypt** – التعليم الإعدادي (Preparatory education). This is a three-year general post-primary programme. Upon completion, graduates are awarded the التعليم الأساسي (Basic education certificate). Students may then proceed to either general or vocational education programmes at the upper secondary level. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

**Germany** – *Sekundarbereich I mit Qualifikation für weiterführende Bildungsgänge* (Lower secondary schools providing access to general upper secondary programmes). This programme (Grades 5 to 9 or 10) following the four years of primary school is marked by the beginning of a more subject-oriented curriculum. Successful graduates are entitled to enter studies at upper secondary general schools (*Gymnasiale Oberstufe*) which prepare students to qualify for ISCED 6 or 7 programmes. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

**India** – *Upper primary (Grades VI to VIII)*. Access to this three-year general education programme requires a primary certificate, which is granted on the successful completion of the six-year primary education programme (ISCED 1). Graduates from upper primary education receive the upper primary certificate, which provides access to the high school programme (ISCED 3). (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244).



**Slovenia** – *Osnovnošolsko izobraževanje (7.-9. razred)* (Basic education (Grades 7 to 9)). This is a three-year programme leading to the *Zaključno spričevalo (osnovne šole)* (Certificate of completion of basic compulsory school) which gives direct access to programmes in upper secondary education. Students enter the programme having successfully completed primary education, typically at the age of 12. (ISCED-P /ISCED-A: 244)

**Solomon Islands** – *Junior Secondary Education* (Forms 1-3) This is a three-year general education programme starting after the successful completion of Standard 6 (which marks the end of primary education). At the end of the programme, students take the *National Form 3 Examination* (NF3) which gives access to upper secondary education. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

#### Examples Group 4:

**Adult education which provides the basic skills necessary for further learning and ISCED level 2 programmes for students with special educational needs [ISCED-P: 243, 244, 253 or 254; ISCED-A: 243, 244, 253 or 254]**

**Belgium (Flemish Community)** – *Buitengewoon secundair onderwijs – opleidingsvorm 1 en 2* (Special secondary education – types 1 and 2). This programme is aimed at children who need special help, temporarily or permanently. In special secondary education, education is organised in accordance with the type of disability and the possibilities of the pupil. Education type 1 provides social education aimed at the integration of the pupil in a sheltered environment. Education type 2 provides general and social education and training for work aimed at the pupils' integration in a sheltered living and working environment. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 253)

**Germany** – *Sekundarbereich I, Abendschulen* (Lower secondary evening schools). This programme (of one to two years of duration) is intended for adults with no or low ISCED level 2 qualifications (e.g. *Hauptschulabschluss*) who want to obtain a higher qualification at the lower secondary level (mostly *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*). (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

**Kuwait** – *المرحلة المتوسطة للكبار* (Adult intermediate stage). This formal adult education programme normally targets adults aged 15 years and older who have completed primary education. Similarly to the initial intermediate stage (lower secondary), the programme has a theoretical duration of four years. Upon successful completion, graduates can proceed to upper secondary adult education programmes. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244)

**Mexico** – *Capacitación para el trabajo* (Lower secondary job training). The typical duration of these programmes is two years, although there are also longer or shorter programmes. Students in this programme are commonly adults. The programme is oriented to train persons (15 years and older) to introduce them to the world of work. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 243)

#### Examples Group 5:

**Second chance or reintegration programmes for students who have not yet completed lower secondary education [ISCED-P: 243, 244, 253 or 254; ISCED-A: 243, 244, 253 or 254]**

**Ireland** – *Youthreach (Foundation Level)*. This is a two-year general programme designed for those who leave school with no qualifications. Certification is available at a range of levels, including a *Junior Certificate* at the lower secondary-level. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A 244)

**Morocco** – *التكوين المهني : مستوى التخصص* (Professional training: specialisation level). Access to this programme is open to students at the level of the sixth grade of primary education who are at least 15 years of age. This two-year programme prepares students to join the labour market. In addition, it provides access to programmes at higher levels of education (ISCED 3). (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 254)

**Slovak Republic<sup>2</sup>** – *Praktická škola* (Practical school). This is a one- to three-year general programme providing education and training for simple work activities designed to give a second chance to young people who have already attended a full cycle of lower secondary education. Entrants are typically aged 15 years or older. The content is not sufficiently complex to be classified at the upper secondary level. It leads to a *Vysvedčenie* (Certificate). (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 243)

#### Examples Group 6:

**Programmes designed for the integration of new migrants [ISCED-P: 241, 243, 244, 253 or 254; ISCED-A: 100, 243, 244, 253 or 254]**

**Belgium (Flemish Community)** – *Onthaalklas voor anderstalige nieuwkomers* (Reception class for immigrants). Reception education is aimed at students who hardly speak any Dutch and who recently arrived in Belgium. The main goal is to learn Dutch and to integrate participants into the type of secondary education and discipline (field of study) that most closely matches their individual capabilities. The curriculum of the reception year is very much focused on the



acquisition of Dutch. A person can enter the reception class when he/she meets the following criteria: 1) on 31 December after the start of the school year, being at least 12 years old and not older than 18 years old; 2) being a recent immigrant (maximum one year of residence in Belgium); 3) having a mother tongue or language at home that is not Dutch; 4) having insufficient knowledge of Dutch to follow the lessons in mainstream education; and 5) maximum nine months of being enrolled in a school with Dutch as the main instruction language. (ISCED-P: 241; ISCED-A: 100)

**Luxembourg** – *Classes d'accueil (ACCU) (12-15 ans)* and *Classes d'insertion pour jeunes adultes (CLJA) (16-17 ans)* (Welcome classes for 12- to 15-year-olds and 16- to 17-year-olds respectively). These are one-year general programmes intended to prepare young people newly arrived from abroad to enter the regular school system either at the lower secondary level (*Classes d'accueil (ACCU) (12-15 ans)*) or at the upper secondary level (*Classes d'insertion pour jeunes adultes (CLJA) (16-17 ans)*). (ISCED-P: 241/ISCED-A: 100 and ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 244 respectively)

**Norway** – *Introduksjonsordning og opplæring i norsk og samfunnskunnskap for nyankomne innvandrere* (Introduction programme to Norwegian language and social conditions for new immigrants). This is a programme of up to two years' duration leading to the *Fullført introduksjonsprogram* (Certificate in Norwegian language and civic studies for adult immigrants). It does not provide access to higher levels of education. (ISCED-P: 241; ISCED-A: 100).

#### Examples Group 7:

**Programmes and qualifications resulting in partial level completion [ISCED-P: 242 or 252; ISCED-A: 242 or 252]**

**Lithuania** – *Profesinio mokymo programa, skirta asmenims, neturintiems pagrindinio išsilavinimo* (Vocational education programmes for persons without basic education). After completion of primary education, students may enter this two-year programme leading to a vocational qualification certificate which allows students to continue education in other lower secondary programmes, giving at the end access to the upper secondary level. (ISCED-P/ISCED-A: 252)

#### Examples Group 8:

**Programmes at ISCED level 2 insufficient for level completion, therefore with educational attainment of ISCED level 1 [ISCED-P: 241 or 251; ISCED A: 100]**

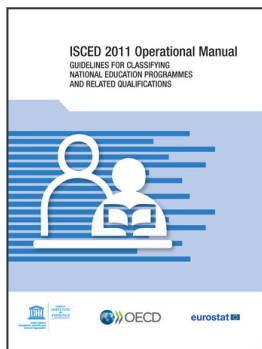
**Algeria** – *التكوين المهني المختص* (Specialised vocational training). This one-year programme is designed to prepare young adolescents for direct access to the labour market. Access to the programme is available to young people aged at least 11 years who are able to read and write. Upon completing the programme, graduates receive a leaving certificate, which is locally considered higher than primary education but less than lower secondary. The programme is considered insufficient for ISCED 2 completion. (ISCED-P: 251; ISCED-A: 100)

**Estonia** – *Põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõpe* (Vocational education for persons who do not have basic education and who have exceeded the age of compulsory school attendance). The entrance age to this programme is around 17 to 19 years and its duration is of half to two and a half years. The entry requirement to this programme is completion of ISCED 1. Graduates obtain a vocational education institution leaving certificate which is considered beyond ISCED level 1 but is insufficient for classification as an ISCED level 2 qualification. (ISCED-P: 251; ISCED-A: 100)

### Notes

1. Paragraph numbers are references to the main ISCED 2011 classification document. See more details in the Reader's Guide.
2. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the European Union (EU) use "Slovakia" as the official name of "Slovak Republic".





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