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Forty-fourth plenary session
(Paris, 11 - 13 June 1996)

REPORT OF THE JOINT ECE-UNESCO-OECD WORK SESSION ON EDUCATION STATISTICS

Note by the secretariats

1. The ECE-UNESCO-OECD joint work session on education statistics was held in Paris from 5-7 February 1996. It was attended by: Austria; Canada; Croatia; the Czech Republic; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Italy; Netherlands; Norway; the Russian Federation; the Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom. The Commission of the European Communities was represented by EUROSTAT. Morocco and Tunisia participated under Article 11 of the terms of reference of the ECE. The International Labour Office (ILO), and the International Statistical Institute (ISI) were also represented. The Chairperson of the UNESCO Task Force on the Revision of ISCED participated at the invitation of the secretariats.
2. Mr. R. Andersson (Sweden) was elected Chairperson and Mr. D. Lynd (Canada) Vice-Chairperson.
3. The provisional agenda (Working Paper No. 1) was adopted.
4. The following substantive topics were discussed at the Work Session:
 - a. Review of the revised International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) manual (Version I)
 - b. Measurement issues between education and labour force participation

5. The topics were discussed on the basis of papers prepared by UNESCO, OECD, Canada and the Slovak Republic.

6. Additional written material was submitted by the Central Bureau of Statistics of Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the five Statistical Offices of the Nordic countries (in form of a joint statement) and Tadjikistan, all of which served as a supplementary basis for discussion.

7. Mr. Colin Power, Assistant Director-General responsible for Education, welcomed the participants and called attention to a number of important aspects which the meeting would also have to consider when working out the framework of the revised ISCED. He reminded the participants that, as with other classifications, there was a political aspect which could not be ignored; to be used, Governments had to find it acceptable for representing their educational systems.

8. The participants were informed about the work of the Conference of European Statisticians and in particular about the current revision of the 2000 round of Census recommendations which ECE and Eurostat are jointly preparing for the countries in the ECE region. The importance of having the revised ISCED ready for being included in the final recommendations, which will be adopted by the CES in June 1997, was pointed out.

9. It was noted that participants to the meeting came from a variety of institutions and represented both producers and users of education statistics. In many countries in the ECE region, government departments and ministries other than national statistical offices (e.g. Ministries of Education and professional organizations) play a strong role in the educational statistics production process and in efforts being made at the national level to improve education statistics. This situation provided special importance to the Conference's long-standing practice of convening meetings on educational statistics jointly with UNESCO, and beginning with this meeting, also with the OECD. Because of the different clients of these organizations joint meetings were a particular useful forum for providing professional feedback from statisticians to policy makers and vice-versa on the developmental work planned and carried out by these bodies in the field of educational statistics.

Future work

10. The participants considered that it would be useful for countries to exchange experiences on the revised ISCED once it had been in use for a couple of years. They therefore recommended that the Conference organize a similar meeting in four years time. They also recommended that the following text be included in the Conference's programme of work:

Activities and means:

Activities of ECE: (CES Priority C)

Work session (2000/2001), jointly with UNESCO and OECD to consider:

(i) problems experienced by countries in applying the new revised ISCED (reports by countries and by UNESCO);

ii) educational indicators: developments and international comparability problems of indicators resulting from statistical definitions and measurement differences (national reports and international organizations);

(ii) possibilities for refining and improving the statistical coverage of continuing education and life-long learning (papers by national rapporteurs and international organizations).

11. The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

10. The main conclusions of the meeting, as approved by the participants at the closing session, are presented in the Annex.

ANNEX

**Summary of the main conclusions reached by the participants at the
Joint ECE-UNESCO-OECD Work Session on Statistics of Education
(Paris, 5 - 7 February 1996)**

I. REVISION OF VERSION I OF ISCED CLASSIFICATION

1. In introducing the discussion on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), the UNESCO Division of Statistics recapitulated its activities so far. In 1993, a special questionnaire was sent to Member States requesting comments and proposals on the key basic elements of the 1976 version of ISCED. The reactions received were synthesized and presented to an expert meeting in October 1994. This meeting recommended the establishment of a Steering Committee which was involved in the drafting of a document on the Conceptual Framework of Education as well as one on levels of education. The latter subject was prepared in collaboration with the French Ministry of Education. An expert meeting in July 1995 considered the document and made recommendations which are reflected in the ISCED - Revised version I, discussed at the current meeting.

2. The Chairman of the Task Force, established by the 28th General Conference of UNESCO to undertake the revision of ISCED, informed the meeting about the work of the group. Initially, the Task Force will concentrate on defining the scope of education and the levels of education. According to the action plan for the revision of ISCED, a final version is expected to be ready by the end of 1996.

3. The four OECD papers on selected issues for the revision of ISCED were introduced by a representative from the OECD who pointed out a broad range of conceptual and methodological issues that the revision must address in order to adequately capture modern and flexible education and training systems. Among the issues mentioned were: (i) the relevance of ISCED for education policy-making and international comparability; (ii) the definition of the level concept on the basis of the content of the underlying educational activities and the operationalisation of the level concept on the basis of multiple auxiliary criteria; (iii) the expansion of the coverage of ISCED in order to better capture the higher levels of education and, specifically, the domain of continuing education and training outside institutional settings; and (iv) the need to address boundary issues and to supplement the conceptual framework with operational instructions and an agreed implementation process.

4. The representative of OECD also made some detailed proposals for solving boundary issues in ISCED. One concerned the operational distinction between the pre-primary and the primary levels of education as well as the boundary between education and child care. Another was a detailed proposal of how issues related to the tertiary level of education could be resolved through the use of a multi-dimensional taxonomy that would account for the general programme orientation, the cumulative duration of educational activities, typical and minimal entrance requirements and national qualification structures.

5. The discussions on ISCED were wide-ranging and varied and resulted in a lively debate which at times gave rise to divergent views on many of the themes considered.
6. The conclusion of the general debate which followed the presentation of a Nordic proposal was that ISCED should be structured, flexible and facilitate the international comparability of education statistics. It was further said that ISCED should be a general classification of educational activities and permit the inclusion of all types of existing educational opportunities as well as anticipating future developments. There was general agreement in favour of including the dimension educational providers, but less agreement for the inclusion of the two other dimensions place of provision and modality of provision. Some participants were unhappy with the focus on higher education and many considered that secondary education, second stage, was equally important and relevant. Many emphasized the importance of duration as a criterion for categories of education and recommended a cumulative duration from the end of compulsory education. The opinion was also expressed that the distinction between non-university and university degrees should be a criterion. It was further mentioned that life-long learning, learning allowing drop-outs to acquire vocational qualifications and comparison of qualifications should be integrated into ISCED. Other issues debated included the definition of education and types of education. It was recommended that UNESCO refine what it needs for comparison purposes in the field of education statistics.
7. Attention was drawn to the fact that register-based (individual) statistics must use especially structured classifications and this needs to be taken into account in the revision.
8. In the discussions on categories of education many participants mentioned the need for main and subsidiary criteria. Some considered duration as being the dominant factor. There was general agreement that the dichotomy general vs. technical/vocational should reflect a description of content and definitions should be further developed. It was also important that the level categorization should be relevant in terms of policy decisions. Flexibility, simplicity should be factors considered in devising a classification scheme for categories of education and, in some manner, appropriate ranking of the criteria-duration, qualifications and entry requirements. Mention was also made of the need to derive information on successful completion of secondary education, access to higher education, training and life-long education. It was also recommended that the term "category" should be replaced by "level", although this term was also not considered perfect.
9. It was mentioned that the distinction between regular education versus adult education/continuing training should be clarified, and that there should be worked out clear definitions of the two types of education in order to avoid confusion and un-clear data collection.
10. The meeting then focused its discussions on each of the categories of education proposed.
11. As regards pre-primary education (category 0), the view was expressed that official or government regulations concerning pedagogical qualifications of educational staff can be considered as a sufficient but not as a necessary

condition for classifying programmes as pre-primary. Child care may have the same content as pre-primary schools and perhaps the age of the child should determine the boundary of pre-primary programmes.

12. In discussing primary education (category 1) mention was made of the variable duration between and even within countries and whether adult literacy should be included in the description of this category of education.

13. When focusing on secondary education, first stage (category 2), the view was expressed that the criteria should be ordered and political factors, such as the length of compulsory education, which could influence the ranking of criteria should have lower priority.

14. In the debate on the proposed definition of secondary education, second stage (category 3), some participants felt that there might be a need to subdivide this category. Other participants mentioned that there was need for a clear distinction between general vs. technical/vocational education and a few questioned the purpose of this dichotomy. The view was expressed that programmes of short/long durations could be accommodated in this category and a clear definition needs to be developed to delimit the boundaries between category 3 and those categories for higher education.

15. The discussions on categories 4 and 5 dwelt on the appropriateness of the term Higher Education. Mention was made of the existence of too many subdivisions for category 4. As regards the term higher education, it was recommended that categories 4 and 5 would be called Tertiary Education because some of it could not be considered as higher education.

16. In the discussion about Fields of Study it appeared that some participants were unhappy with this term. Furthermore, despite the increase in number of fields some thought that vocational subjects were still not adequately reflected. The meeting recommended that the survey currently being undertaken by Eurostat on fields of specialization in technical/vocational education should, as far as possible, be integrated into the fields of study.

II. MEASUREMENT ISSUES BETWEEN EDUCATION AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

17. Discussion on the transition between education and work was considered on the basis of a Canadian paper which showed that transition from school to work has become more complex and there no longer is a clear distinction between the two activities. In many countries, a considerable proportion of students are studying and working simultaneously. Work has become a parallel activity for many students that grows through the years from generating pocket-money to supporting financially the studies. It was noted that this pattern is apparent even in countries where tertiary education is free.

18. The simultaneity of studies and work has various consequences. A number of weekly hours worked by secondary students, beyond a threshold, seems likely to jeopardize graduation at that level and lead to dropping out prematurely. The meeting was told that the duration of post-graduate studies was prolonged for students who engaged in work activities. This appeared to be the case in several countries, even in those where student loans and grants schemes were common. On the other hand, the labour market experience gained

from working did seem to facilitate the transition to full-time work. This was the case even though student jobs are mostly in services and unrelated to their studies. Several countries reported a positive correlation between work experience and the probability of finding a job. However, formal systems integrating study and work proved to provide the best assistance in the school-to-work transition process. The meeting was further told that finding a job might influence students access to further education and as such is of concern to public policy.

19. The meeting also discussed the common finding that people with higher education were more likely to continue education and to study and work simultaneously. This pattern was attributed to the fact that educated people value education more and that employers are more likely to support further training for employees with already high levels of education. No country had a solution to offer as to how to change this pattern.
