

The ISCED-97 in the Polish context

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1 Introduction

The ISCED-97 fits quite well all levels of the educational system existing in Poland today. The present system is primarily based on the following Sejm (Parliament) Acts: (a) the Education System Act of 7 September 1991, (b) the Act of 8 January 1999 on the Implementation of the Education System Reform, and (c) the Act on Higher Education of 27 July 2005. All of these Acts have introduced substantial changes to the education system existing in state-socialist Poland up to 1989. It can be argued that to some extent the present good fit has resulted from the fact that the legislation mentioned has taken into consideration at least some of the ISCED traditions and accomplishments existing at the time when the legislation was adopted. Basic programmes operating within the ISCED levels in Poland at present can be described as follows:¹

2 Allocation of the Polish educational credentials to the categories of the ISCED-97

2.1 Pre-primary education (ISCED 0)

A child aged three to five may attend a kindergarten (*przedszkole*), while starting with 2004/05 all six-year olds receive one year of compulsory pre-primary education in either kindergartens or pre-primary classes run by primary schools (*oddziały przedszkolne*). In 2004/05, only 38.2% of children aged three to five were in kindergartens. Fees for attending kindergartens introduced over recent years have caused a significant drop in the attendance rate at that level.

¹ The description given below is based on *The System of Education in Poland*, published by the Polish Eurydice Unit (Eurydice, 2006) in *The Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland – 2005*, and the 2006 working version of the Polish ISCMAP-PROG and ISCMAP-QUAL Tables prepared for UOE Data Collection.

2.2 Primary education (ISCED 1)

The Education System Reform of 1999 introduced a new six-year primary school (*szkoła podstawowa*) at ISCED level 1. It is the only school at this level. Education in this school is divided into two stages: (a) integrated teaching in grades 1 to 3, and (b) subject and cross-curricular teaching in grades 4 to 6. An external standardized test upon completing primary school was introduced in 2002. Results of this test appear on the primary school leaving certificate which is required for admission to a lower secondary general school (*gimnazjum*).

2.3 Lower secondary general education (ISCED 2)

“Before 1999 there was no distinction in the Polish education system between lower and upper secondary schools. The lower secondary level was included in the eight-year single structure (primary) school.” (Eurydice, 2006: 26) In 1999 the lower secondary level was established by introducing a new school type – a three-year *gimnazjum* [ISCED 2A G] with subject and cross-curricular teaching and external standardized examination upon completion. Results of this exam are indicated on the *gimnazjum* leaving certificate which is required for transitions to the upper secondary level.²

ISCED 0–2 as defined above constitutes full-time compulsory education in Poland. Full-time compulsory education normally lasts till the age of sixteen (the standard age of *gimnazjum* completion) and no longer than up to the age of eighteen. Part-time compulsory education, in schools or out-of-schools forms, lasts till the age of eighteen.

2.4 Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)

In the current Polish education system there are six types of post-*gimnazjum* programmes at this level.

1. General upper secondary school (*liceum ogólnokształcące*), which 46% of all ISCED 3 students chose in 2004/05, is assigned to ISCED 3A (gen). It is a three-year programme of full-time general upper secondary education for students aged 16 to 19. After its completion, students can sit for *Matura* examination

² Job-training schools on the basis of the 6th grade of primary school also belong to the category of *gimnazjum*. In the school year 2004/5 there were, however, only 92 of them (with 24.2 thousand students); the total number of *gimnazja* in that year was 6,171 with 161.5 thousand students. The numbers given exclude special schools (Statistical Yearbook 2005: 349). These job-training schools could be possibly classified as ISCED 2C V.

the passing of which is a necessary condition for being admitted to ISCED 5 type of educational institutions.

2. Specialized upper secondary school (*liceum profilowane*), which 15% of all ISCED 3 students attend, is also assigned to ISCED 3A, but (gen/prev). It is a new school type established in 2002/03 offering a three-year, full-time, general programme of upper secondary education combined with a specialized pre-vocational instruction for students aged 16 to 19. Students completing this programme can sit for *Matura* exam and having passed it can be admitted to universities and higher vocational schools.
3. Technical upper secondary school (*technikum*), which 24% of all ISCED 3 students chose, is again classified as ISCED 3A, this time (voc/gen). It is a four-year school providing full-time technical and vocational skills needed at the technician level and general education needed for *Matura* examination. Typical students are in the age range of 16 to 20 years.
4. Basic vocational school (*zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa*), which 15% of all ISCED 3 students attend, is assigned to ISCED 3C (voc/gen). It covers two- to three-year full-time programmes providing vocational skills needed at the skilled worker level and general education which enables transfer to supplementary general and technical secondary schools described below.
5. Supplementary general upper secondary school (*uzupełniająca liceum ogólnokształcące*) is classified as ISCED 3A (gen). It is a two-year supplementary general secondary school offering full- or part-time general upper secondary education to students graduating from basic vocational schools (ISCED 3C, voc/gen). Students completing supplementary general upper secondary school can sit for *Matura* examination. These schools were introduced in 2004/2005 with 1400 students in that year.
6. Supplementary technical upper secondary school (*technikum uzupełniająca*) is assigned to ISCED 3A (voc/gen). It is a three-year supplementary technical secondary school offering full- or part-time vocational upper secondary education to students graduating from basic vocational schools (ISCED 3C, voc/gen). Students completing supplementary technical secondary school can sit for *Matura* examination. These schools were introduced in 2004/2005 with 4000 students in that year.

2.5 Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4)

The only schools operating at this level in Poland are post-secondary vocational schools (*szkoły policealne*, ISCED 4C, voc). These two- and two-and-a-half-year schools predominantly recruit students from general upper secondary schools. Some of them require *Matura* certificate – for some a secondary school leaving certificate is enough. Completion of this school typically leads to the title of a

skilled worker, a technician or some equivalent occupational certificates. Most of students attending *szkoły policealne* are women.

2.6 Tertiary education (ISCED 5B)

In the current Polish educational system, there are two basic programmes at this level: (1) teacher training college (*kolegium nauczycielskie*, KN for short), and (2) foreign language teacher training college (*nauczycielskie kolegium języków obcych*, NKJO for short, both assigned to ISCED 5B medium. As all tertiary educational institutions, they admit applicants possessing the *Matura* certificate (those who passed the *Matura* examination).

2.7 Tertiary education (ISCED 5A)

Three main possibilities exist at this level in Poland: (1) Schools of higher vocational education or first cycles of university-type courses (*Studia pierwszego stopnia*) offering a Bachelor's degree (licentiate, engineer), classified as ISCED 5A (first/medium), (2) Supplementary Master-degree studies (*Studia drugiego stopnia*) for those possessing a Bachelor's degree, classified as ISCED 5A (second/medium), and (3) University uniform Master-degree studies (*Jednolite studia magisterskie*), ISCED 5A (first/long).

Not included in the description prepared by the Polish Eurydice Unit are post-graduate studies (*studia podyplomowe*) for those possessing a Master's degree, classified as ISCED 5A (second/very long). They became quite popular during recent years – as of 2004/05, 136490 persons were enrolled.

2.8 Doctoral studies (ISCED 6)

In 2004/5 there were 33040 doctoral students in Poland. 1625 of them were affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences.

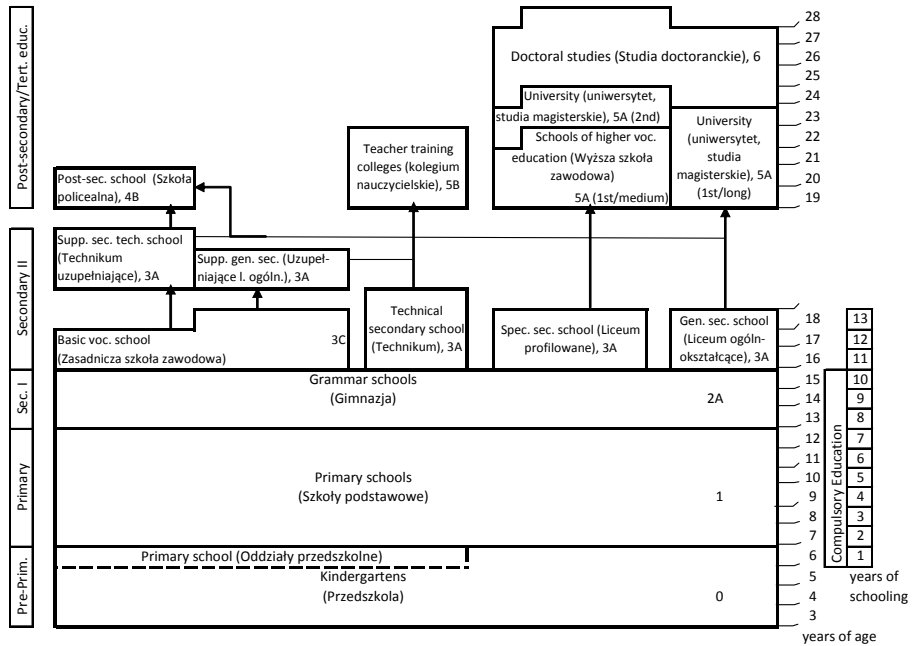
3 Comments on the ISCED-97 implementation

The description given above has been depicted by the Polish Eurydice Unit (Eurydice, 2006: 6) in figure 1.

The above given descriptions and the figure summarizing them are treated in details in the 2006 working versions of the Polish ISCMAP-PROG Table which lists almost 80 programmes including special schools, schools for adults, etc. and the ISCMAP-QUAL Table which lists almost 20 distinct educational qualifications. These tables enable very good mapping of the current Polish educational system into

ISCED-97 categories. The same cannot, however, be said about applying the ISCED-97 to the highest level of education *attained* in Poland.

Figure 1. The Polish system of education



The reasons are, to a great extent, obvious from the analysis presented thus far. First, Poland has witnessed over the last decades and years substantial changes in the structure of the educational system and this has resulted in different cohorts graduating from different educational systems with different certificates which are difficult to compare and integrate into one coherent system. Second, some distinctions traditionally very important in Poland are not part of the ISCED framework.

As far as changes in the educational system are concerned, it may be enough to stress that the years 1932, 1945, 1948, 1961, and 1999 mark major educational reforms in Poland and within the current general population graduates from all educational systems can be found. The reform of 1999 abolishing a single-structure eight year-primary school (classified as ISCED 2) and introducing a new six-year primary school (ISCED 1) and *gimnazjum* (ISCED 2) demonstrates well that having primary education may mean quite different things in the Polish context. Many pages could be written about details of earlier reforms.

As far as important distinctions not supported by the ISCED are concerned, stress should be put on *Matura* certificate which is a state examination that can be taken upon completion of most upper secondary schools and is a necessary condition for

being admitted to ISCED 5 institutions. Most Polish classifications are very explicit about distinguishing between those having *Matura* and those who, even if they completed upper secondary schools, decided not to sit for *Matura*. The latter group should be classified ISCED 3C rather than 3A.

In Poland there is thus an obvious need for a sort of multilayer classifications with the layer being the period people were in educational institutions. The Government has recognized this need in its 2003 directive which has introduced identification codes for the educational system under which one got his or her educational credentials. These codes are as follows:

Table 1. Governmental identification codes

0	educational system is irrelevant (applies especially to higher education and university studies and to the pre-school level)
1	the educational system after the 1999 reform has been implemented
2	the educational system functioning in the period of implementing the 1999 reform
3	the educational system existing at the moment of starting the 1999 reform
4	all educational systems existing before the system existing at the moment of starting the 1999 reform was introduced

The Polish Classification of Education adopted in 2003 by the Council of Minister of the Republic of Poland requires that these five codes are used jointly with a long list of educational qualifications representing a broad spectrum of old and new credentials (Directive from the 6th of May 2003, published in the *Dziennik Ustaw* from the 3rd of June 2003, No.88, item 439 [ROZPORZĄDZENIE RADY MINISTRÓW z dnia 6 maja 2003 r. w sprawie Polskiej Klasyfikacji Edukacji {Dz. U. z dnia 3 czerwca 2003 r.}]):

Table 2. The Polish classification of education

W0	No education
W01	No school education
W01	Uncompleted primary education
W1	Primary education
W11	Completing a primary school
W12	Completing a primary vocational <i>studium</i> ^a
W13	Primary art education
W2	Lower secondary education (<i>gimnazjum</i>)
W3	Basic vocational education or secondary education

Table 2. The Polish classification of education (continued)

W31	Basic vocational education
W311	Completing a basic vocational school based on three-year <i>gimnazjum</i>
W312	Completing a basic vocational school based on pre-1999 eight- or seven-year primary school ^b
W313	Completing an art school offering no general instruction at a secondary level
W32	Secondary education without the <i>Matura</i> exam passed
W321	Completing a general secondary school (<i>liceum ogólnokształcące</i>)
W322	Completing a vocational secondary school (<i>liceum zawodowe</i>)
W323	Completing a technical secondary school (<i>technikum</i>)
W324	Completing a specialized secondary school (<i>liceum profilowane</i>)
W325	Completing an art school offering general instruction at a secondary level
W329	Completing other secondary school
W33	Secondary education with the <i>Matura</i> exam passed
	Completing a general secondary school (<i>liceum ogólnokształcące</i>)
	Completing a vocational secondary school (<i>liceum zawodowe</i>)
	Completing a technical secondary school (<i>technikum</i>)
	Completing a specialized secondary school (<i>liceum profilowane</i>)
	Completing an art school offering general instruction at a secondary level
W339	Completing other secondary school
W34	Post-secondary education
W341	Completing a post-secondary school without the <i>Matura</i> exam passed
W342	Completing a post-secondary school with the <i>Matura</i> exam passed
W4	College education (Teacher Training and Foreign Language Teacher Training Colleges)
W5	Higher vocational education (engineer, licentiate, etc. titles)
W6	University education (master, diploma engineer, medical doctor, etc. titles)
W8	Scientific degree of <i>Doktor</i>
W9	Scientific degree of <i>Doktor habilitowany</i>

Notes:

^a Before the 1999 reform attending an one-year “podstawowe studium zawodowe” was offering adults a chance to receive primary school leaving certificate and vocational instruction which, upon passing an exam, would secure the title of a skilled worker.

^b Seven-year primary schools till 1961, eight-year schools afterwards.

4 Comparing the ISCED-97 in the EU-LFS with other data sources

Up to now there are no statistics in Poland which would fully conform to this classification. In the next paragraphs we try, however, to compare Polish input into the EU-LFS data base with other more detailed classifications which refer to some distinctions presented in the above table.

In the data collected in Poland within the framework of the BEAL³ surveys conducted by the Central Statistical Office every quarter and constituting the Polish input into the EU-LFS data base, only the following categories of the highest educational level attained can be distinguished:

Table 3. Educational attainment in Poland (population aged 25–64 in the fourth quarter of 2003), in per cent

Less than ISCED 1	0.4
ISCED 1	0.2
ISCED 2	17.0
ISCED 3C	33.8
ISCED 3A	32.9
ISCED 4C	3.3
ISCED 5AB and 6	12.5

It should be noted that “less than ISCED 1” in the distribution given above means no formal education and primary education not completed, ISCED 1 level refers to primary school completed in or after 1999 (the year of introducing a new six-year primary school, and *gimnazjum*), ISCED 2 combines *gimnazjum* and old eight-year primary school completed before 1999, ISCED 3C stands for basic vocational school (*zasadnicza szkoła zawodowa*), ISCED 3A adds two levels phrased as “secondary general” (*średnie ogólnokształcące*) and “secondary vocational” (*średnie zawodowe*), 4C represents *szkoły policealne*, and the *Matura* examination has not been taken into account at all. For future comparative purposes it is also good to know that up to the year 2000, an eight-year primary school (completed or not) was classified as ISCED 2 and that starting with 2004, BAEL data distinguish ISCED 6 but still do not include information on *Matura* and do not distinguish between ISCED 5A and B. Some of these bits of information on very recent changes are, of course, irrelevant for analyses focusing on the population aged 25–64 – persons who for the most part got education well before the recent reforms.

³ BEAL stands for *Badanie Ekonomicznej Aktywności Ludności* (Survey of the Economic Activity of the Population).

From the Polish part of the EU-LSF data base, we have chosen data from 2003 because this best enables us to compare EU-LSF percentages to distributions from two other data sets which used more detailed educational classifications: (1) Census data from 2002 and (2) fourth wave of POLPAN study from 2003.

These distributions are quite similar to the EU-LSF distribution. They use the same labels but they also consistently distinguish between those who passed *Matura* examination and those who did not. They additionally differentiate sublevels of ISCED 5 and separate ISCED 6. There are many interesting questions that could be asked of, for example, those ca. 25% ISCED 3A (voc) graduates who leave the education system without *Matura*. How do they cope later on the labour market, how much do they earn, what segment of the economy do they work for? Some answers are known. Integrating information on *Matura* with the ISCED framework in Poland would help asking and answering more of such questions.

Table 4. Comparison between EU-LFS and POLPAN (population aged 25–64), in per cent

ISCED-97 level	CENSUS 2002	POLPAN 2003	EU-LFS 2003
Less than ISCED 1			0.4
ISCED 1	0.5	0.1	0.2
ISCED 2	17.9	17.0	17.0
ISCED 3C	34.3	32.4	33.8
ISCED 3A of which	30.1	30.4	32.9
general without <i>Matura</i>	1.4	2.3	
general with <i>Matura</i>	5.4	5.3	
vocational without <i>Matura</i>	6.6	4.9	
vocational with <i>Matura</i>	16.7	17.9	
ISCED 4C of which	4.4	5.5	3.3
without <i>Matura</i>	0.4	0.3	
with <i>Matura</i>	4.0	5.2	
ISCED 5 of which	12.4	14.1	12.5
A medium, B	2.9	4.0	
A long	9.6	10.1	
ISCED 6	0.4	0.4	included in ISCED 5

Note: Census data for the age group 25–64 reported here are estimations obtained by weighting the published population distribution of the group aged 13 and more. The weights have been derived from the 2003 edition of a large scale survey “Diagnoza Społeczna” (<http://www.diagnoza.com/index-en.html>). POLPAN data are from the fourth wave of longitudinal study started in 1988; new entrants to the panel are included in the data (for more information see <http://www.ifispan.waw.pl/files/socnierowno/index.html>). No weighting for panel attrition was done in the analyses reported here. N for the 25–64 age group in this table is 1144.

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