



## **Credit Rating Definitions**

Scope Ratings GmbH & Scope Ratings UK Ltd.

06 May 2022

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## 1. Introduction

This document presents the Credit Rating terms and definitions of Scope Ratings GmbH and Scope Ratings UK Limited (Scope Ratings). These terms apply to Credit Ratings produced by Scope Ratings including the Sovereign and Public Sector<sup>1</sup>, Financial Institutions, Corporates, Structured Finance, Covered Bonds and Project Finance asset classes.

Please see the [Defined Terms Glossary](#). Terms may change as and when necessary.

## 2. Main Credit Rating definitions

A Credit Rating is a forward-looking opinion regarding the relative creditworthiness of an issuer, an instrument or an obligation and is assigned using an established and defined ranking system of Credit Rating categories.

Scope Ratings' opinions on creditworthiness address the timely payment or expected loss for financial obligations, as defined in Scope Ratings' respective Credit Rating methodology.

### 2.1 Credit Ratings assigned to an issuer

#### Credit Rating terms:

Issuer rating

Short-term issuer rating

Issuer rating (foreign currency)

Short-term issuer rating (foreign currency)

Note: Credit ratings refer to the relative creditworthiness of the issuer in its local currency unless mentioned otherwise.

#### Credit Rating definitions:

- **Issuer ratings** assigned on Scope Ratings' **long-term** Credit Rating scale are forward-looking opinions on the relative creditworthiness of an issuer's ability and willingness to repay its financial obligations when due and with an original maturity of one year or more.
- **Short-term issuer ratings** assigned on Scope Ratings' **short-term** Credit Rating scale are forward-looking opinions on the relative creditworthiness of an issuer in terms of its ability and willingness to repay its financial obligations when due, typically within 12 months.

### 2.2 Credit Ratings assigned to debt instruments

**The Credit Rating term** describes the type of debt rated by Scope Ratings. Common Credit Rating terms are:

Debt rating

Debt issuance programme rating

Senior secured debt rating

Senior unsecured debt rating

Preferred senior unsecured debt rating

Non-preferred senior unsecured debt rating

Subordinated debt rating

Subordinated debt (hybrid) ratings

Tier 2 capital securities rating

Additional tier 1 capital securities rating

Short-term debt rating

**Note:** Credit Ratings refer to the relative creditworthiness, as further defined in the relevant Credit Rating methodologies, of the issuer and debt instrument in its local currency unless mentioned otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes sub-sovereign issuers, government-related issuers and supnationals

### Credit Rating definitions:

- **Debt Ratings** are assigned to a debt instrument on Scope Ratings' **long-term** Credit Rating scale.
- **Debt issuance programme ratings** are assigned to issuers issuing debt under an established debt issuance programme.
- **Senior secured debt ratings** are assigned to debt, secured by a lien against collateral, which has priority over unsecured debt in case of resolution or insolvency.
- **Senior unsecured debt ratings** are assigned to debt which has priority over other unsecured debt in case of an insolvency and does not benefit from security over collateral.
- **Preferred senior unsecured debt ratings** are assigned to debt which is not secured by collateral and which has priority over other unsecured debt in case of resolution or insolvency in jurisdictions which have defined non-preferred senior unsecured debt.
- **Non-preferred senior unsecured debt ratings** are assigned to senior debt which is not secured by collateral and which ranks below preferred senior debt and above subordinated debt in resolution or insolvency.
- **Subordinated debt ratings** are assigned to unsecured subordinated debt which ranks lower than senior debt in case of resolution or insolvency.
- **Subordinated debt (hybrid) ratings** are assigned to hybrid subordinated debt which ranks lower than senior debt in case of resolution or insolvency.
- **Tier 2 capital securities ratings** are assigned to debt qualifying as Tier 2 capital as defined under current bank capital regulations.
- **Additional Tier 1 capital securities ratings** are assigned to debt qualifying as Tier 1 capital as defined under current bank capital regulations.
- **Short-term debt ratings** assigned on Scope Ratings' **short-term** Credit Rating scale are forward-looking opinions on the relative creditworthiness of debt instruments. Short-term debt ratings are assigned to short-term debt instruments with a maturity of not more than 12 months.

### Other:

- **Recoveries** address amounts to be recovered following a default or a default-like event. Recovery definitions are specific to the different sectors as described, where relevant, in Scope Ratings' respective methodologies. [Scope Ratings' Idealised Tables](#) providing the idealised probability of default and idealised expected loss, generally consistent with a given rating level over a given risk horizon, are available in Excel format at [www.scoperatings.com](http://www.scoperatings.com).

## 3. Scope Ratings' Credit Rating scales

### 3.1 Long-term Credit Rating scale

The **long-term Credit Rating scale** for issuers, debt instruments and their debt instrument categories is the following:

AAA	Credit Ratings at the AAA level reflect an opinion of exceptionally strong credit quality.	
AA	Credit Ratings at the AA level reflect an opinion of very strong credit quality.	
A	Credit Ratings at the A level reflect an opinion of strong credit quality.	
BBB	Credit Ratings at the BBB level reflect an opinion of good credit quality.	
BB	Credit Ratings at the BB level reflect an opinion of moderate credit quality.	
B	Credit Ratings at the B level reflect an opinion of weak credit quality.	
CCC	Credit Ratings at the CCC level reflect an opinion of very weak credit quality.	<b>Debt instruments in default:</b> These Credit Ratings may also be assigned to debt categories and debt instruments in default*, see section 3.4.3. Credit Rating of debt instruments in default for more information.
CC	Credit Ratings at the CC level reflect an opinion of extremely weak credit quality.	
C	Credit Ratings at the C level reflect an opinion of exceptionally weak credit quality.	
D/SD	Credit Ratings at the D or SD level reflect a default* situation with average to low or no recoveries.	

\*See definition of default in section 3.4.1 below.

**Notches** – Scope Ratings' long-term Credit Ratings are expressed with symbols from AAA to D/SD, with '+' and '-' as additional sub-categories for each category from AA to B (inclusive). There are 20 levels in total.

## 3.2 Short-term Credit Rating scale

The **short-term Credit Rating scale** for issuers, debt instruments and their debt instrument categories is the following:

S-1+	Credit Ratings at the S-1+ level reflect an opinion of the lowest credit risk with the highest capacity to repay short-term obligations.
S-1	Credit Ratings at the S-1 level reflect an opinion of very low credit risk with high capacity to repay short-term obligations.
S-2	Credit Ratings at the S-2 level reflect an opinion of low credit risk with good capacity to repay short-term obligations.
S-3	Credit Ratings at the S-3 level reflect an opinion of acceptable credit risk with fair capacity to repay short-term obligations.
S-4	Credit Ratings at the S-4 level reflect an opinion of moderate to high credit risk with modest to very low capacity to repay short-term obligations.
D/SD	Credit Ratings at the D or SD level reflect a default* situation.

\*See definition of default in section 3.4.1 below.

## 3.3 Short-term/long-term Credit Rating correspondence

Short-term Credit Ratings can be derived from the long-term issuer Credit Ratings. They can be mapped as follows:

	Scope Ratings				
	S-1+	S-1	S-2	S-3	S-4
AAA					
AA+					
AA	S-1+				
AA-		S-1			
A+			S-2		
A				S-3	
A-					S-4
BBB+					
BBB					
BBB-					
BB+					
BB					
BB-					
B+					
B					
B-					
CCC					
CC					
C					
D					

## 3.4 Ratings in default

### 3.4.1 Default definition

**Default** – Scope Ratings considers the following events to constitute a default:

- failure to pay a coupon or principal payment on the due date and after a grace period specified under the instrument's terms and conditions<sup>2</sup>,
- as applicable, supervisory action such as a bank resolution, liquidation, insolvency proceedings of the debt issuer or a moratorium resulting in debt non-payment or debt restructuring, and
- any distressed debt exchange, restructuring or debt swap, which i) leads to less favourable terms or a loss of value compared to the original terms of the debt, including unilateral or coercive currency redenomination, and ii) has the effect of avoiding a likely default.

<sup>2</sup> Typically, not longer than 30 days

For the avoidance of doubt, Scope Ratings does not consider the following to constitute a default: i) technical default triggered by force majeure; or ii) the non-payment of interest if such deferral is permitted under the terms and conditions of the securities.

**Default status** – Upon the occurrence of a default, as per the above, the credit rating is in a default status and will be reported as such. The following sections (3.4.2 and 3.4.3) indicate the credit ratings assigned upon this status.

### 3.4.2 Credit Rating of issuers in default:

Scope Ratings assigns a 'D' or 'SD' credit rating to: i) corporate, bank, sovereign and public finance issuer credit ratings in a default status; and ii) debt category Credit Ratings with at least one instrument in a default status in that debt category.

<b>D</b>	Default Credit Ratings
<b>SD</b>	Selective default Credit Ratings are assigned at issuer level and debt category level if one specific class or currency of several but not all issuances of an issuer is defaulted. An 'SD' issuer Credit Rating is assigned when an issuer has selectively defaulted on certain debt obligations but not all. Such a selective default can be the consequence of a forced debt restructuring (e.g. a distressed debt exchange or creditor bail in). An SD at issuer level is not automatically triggered by the write-down or conversion of bank capital instruments that have a hybrid role in a bank's capital structure.

### 3.4.3 Credit Rating of debt instruments in default:

Debt instruments in default are generally rated at the lower end of the rating scale according to the long term and short term Credit Rating scales defined above, depending on the amount and degree of certainty of expected recoveries, see table below:

<b>B-</b>	Default with extremely high level of expected recovery with extremely high certainty
<b>CCC</b>	Default with very high level of expected recovery with very high certainty
<b>CC</b>	Default with average to high level of expected recovery and high certainty
<b>C</b>	Default with above average expected recovery and/or average certainty
<b>D</b>	Default with average to low or no expected recovery and/or high uncertainty

Typically, only secured debt instruments with high quality collateral or debt instruments experiencing non-payment on a relatively minor amount are expected to be rated above D while in default. Scope Ratings may assign a credit rating higher than B- to a debt instrument in default under exceptional circumstances and in instances where a default is likely to be temporary and is associated with exceptionally high recovery expectations with an extremely high degree of certainty.

The above section must be read in conjunction with Scope Ratings' respective methodologies.

## 4. Other indicators and suffixes

### 4.1 Preliminary Credit Ratings prefix (P)

Preliminary Credit Ratings are identified with the prefix (P) and assigned in advance of the issuance of the debt. Scope Ratings will only assign a preliminary Credit Rating on future issues where it expects to assign a new Credit Rating. Once the debt issuance is final and in line with the provisional terms and conditions used to assign the preliminary Credit Ratings, the Preliminary Credit Rating is withdrawn, and a new Credit Rating is assigned. If the final terms and conditions of the debt differs materially from the provisional terms and conditions, the new Credit Rating may differ from the preliminary Credit Rating. Scope Ratings generally expects a preliminary Credit Rating to be converted into a new Credit Rating or withdrawn within six months of it being assigned.

### 4.2 Structured finance suffix (SF)

Scope Ratings' Credit Ratings of structured finance instruments carry an SF suffix (e.g. BBB+<sub>SF</sub>). This symbol identifies Credit Ratings assigned to structured finance instruments as defined by Regulation (EU) No. 1060/2009 on Credit Rating Agencies of the European Parliament and the European Council<sup>3</sup>.

### 4.3 Financial contract suffix (FC)

Scope Ratings' Credit Ratings of financial contracts are identified with the suffix FC (e.g. A<sub>FC</sub>). This symbol identifies Credit Ratings which address the ability of a structured finance special purpose vehicle to meet its financial obligations under the financial contracts to which it is party.

### 4.4 Withdrawn (WD)

Withdraw (WD) indicates a Credit Rating assigned by Scope Ratings which has subsequently been withdrawn due to: i) the instrument having reached its final maturity or the debt having been redeemed prior to its final maturity, called, prefunded or cancelled; or ii) a business decision taken by Scope Ratings; or iii) the lack of sufficient information required to maintain the rating.

### 4.5 Ramp-up prefix (r)

The ramp-up prefix (r) is used for assigned asset portfolio ratings (e.g. (r)BBB) where, in a ramp-up phase, issuance proceeds are used to increase the underlying portfolio with additional assets.

### 4.6 Credit Estimates (est)

Credit Estimates are identified by the suffix est (e.g. A<sub>est</sub>).

### 4.7 Rating Assessment Service Suffix (ras)

Rating Assessment Services are identified with the suffix ras (e.g. A<sub>ras</sub>).

### 4.8 Asset portfolio suffix (AP)

Asset portfolio ratings are identified by the suffix AP (e.g. AAA<sub>AP</sub>).

## 5. Credit Rating actions

### 5.1 Overview of Credit Rating actions

A Credit Rating action is any one of the items below:

- Preliminary: Preliminary (P) Credit Ratings are assigned in advance of an instrument issuance.
- New: The assignment of a new Credit Rating (may or may not be preceded by a preliminary Credit Rating).
- Upgrade: The upgrade of a Credit Rating.
- Downgrade: The downgrade of a Credit Rating.
- Default: The assignment or removal of a default status.
- Under Review: The placement of a Credit Rating 'Under Review' for a possible upgrade or downgrade, or for a developing outcome.
- Confirmation: If a Credit Rating is removed from Under Review without an upgrade or downgrade.
- Affirmation: If a Credit Rating is affirmed following a rating committee.
- Withdrawal: If a Credit Rating is withdrawn.
- Assignment of a new Outlook or a changed Outlook for a Credit Rating.

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<sup>3</sup> EU legislation which applied directly or indirectly to the UK before 11.00 p.m. on 31 December 2020 has been retained in UK law as a form of domestic legislation known as 'retained EU legislation'. This is set out in [sections 2](#) and [3](#) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 (c. 16). [Section 4](#) of the 2018 Act ensures that any remaining EU rights and obligations, including directly effective rights within EU treaties, continue to be recognised and available in domestic law after exit.



### 5.2 Credit Rating Under Review

A Credit Rating can be placed Under Review for upgrade, downgrade or a developing outcome. The Under Review status indicates that this Credit Rating is under consideration for a change with further analysis needed to determine the Credit Rating outcome. Scope Ratings intends to resolve the status of a Credit Rating placed Under Review as soon as practicable and over a period not exceeding three months. The Under Review status will be resolved with a Credit Rating being upgraded, downgraded, or confirmed by a rating committee. However, the latter can decide to maintain the Under Review status if more time is required to complete the analysis (this is not a rating action). The direction of the Under Review status can also be changed (which constitutes a rating action). A Credit Rating Under Review is generally only taken off Under Review after the review has been concluded. Not all rating changes are preceded by an Under Review status.

### 5.3 Outlook

A Credit Rating can be accompanied by a Credit Rating Outlook, which can be Stable, Positive or Negative. The Positive and Negative Outlooks normally refer to a period of 12-18 months. These Outlooks provide an indication of the most likely direction of a potential rating change. However, they do not necessarily signal that an upgrade or a downgrade of a Credit Rating will automatically follow.

Scope Ratings does not assign a Credit Rating Outlook to structured finance or project finance instruments or to Credit Ratings that are Under Review.



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