

# What are the least developed countries?

## ► 46 countries

As of 2021, 46 countries are designated by the United Nations as least developed countries (LDCs). These are: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, the Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen and Zambia.

## ► Status reviewed every 3 years

The list of LDCs is reviewed every three years by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), a group of independent experts that reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Following the review, the CDP may recommend, in its report to ECOSOC, countries for addition to the list or graduation of existing LDCs from LDC status. Between 2017 and 2020, the CDP undertook a comprehensive review of the LDC criteria, which were further refined in 2023. The resulting revised criteria are scheduled to be first applied at the triennial review scheduled to take place in March 2024.

The following criteria and thresholds for inclusion in the LDC category or for graduation from the category will be applied in the 2024 review:

- (a) An **income criterion**, based on a three-year average estimate of the gross national income (GNI) per capita in United States dollars, using conversion factors based on the World Bank Atlas methodology. The threshold for inclusion and graduation is based on the thresholds of the World Bank's low-income category. For the 2024 triennial review, the threshold for *inclusion* is set at \$1,088 or less; the threshold for *graduation* is set at \$1,306 or more.
- (b) A **human assets index (HAI)**, comprising a health sub-index and an education sub-index. The health sub-index has three indicators: (i) under-five mortality rate; (ii) maternal mortality ratio; and (iii) prevalence of stunting. The education sub-index has three indicators: (i) lower secondary school completion rate; (ii) adult literacy rate; and (iii) gender parity index for lower secondary school completion. All six indicators are converted into indices using established methodologies with an equal weight. The thresholds for inclusion and graduation have been set at 60 or below and 66 or above, respectively, for the 2024 triennial review.
- (c) An **economic and environmental vulnerability index (EVI)**, consisting of two sub-indices: economic vulnerability and environmental vulnerability. The economic vulnerability sub-index has four indicators: (i) share of agriculture, forestry and fishing in gross domestic product; (ii) remoteness and landlockedness; (iii) merchandise export concentration; and (iv) instability of exports of goods and services. The environmental vulnerability sub-index has four indicators: (i) share of population in low elevated coastal zones; (ii) share of the population living in drylands; (iii) instability of agricultural production; and (iv) victims of disasters. All eight indicators are converted into indices using established methodologies with an equal weight. The thresholds for inclusion and graduation have been set at 36 or above and 32 or below, respectively, for the 2024 triennial review.

At each triennial review, all countries in developing regions are reviewed against the criteria. If a non-LDC meets the established inclusion thresholds for all three criteria in a single review, it can become eligible for inclusion. Inclusion requires the consent of the country concerned, and becomes effective immediately after the General Assembly takes note of the Committee's recommendation. No recommendations were made for inclusion at the CDP's 2021 triennial review.

To graduate from the LDC category, a country must meet the established graduation thresholds of at least two of the criteria for two consecutive triennial reviews. Countries that are highly vulnerable, or have very low human assets, are eligible for graduation only if they meet the other two criteria by a sufficiently high margin. As an exception, a country whose per capita income is sustainably above the “income-only” graduation threshold, set at three times the graduation threshold (\$3,918 for the 2024 triennial review), becomes eligible for graduation, even if it fails to meet the other two criteria.

## ► LDC graduation

Six countries have graduated from least developed country status:

- **Botswana** in December 1994
- **Cabo Verde** in December 2007
- **Maldives** in January 2011
- **Samoa** in January 2014
- **Equatorial Guinea** in June 2017
- **Vanuatu** in December 2020

The CDP has recommended graduation from the LDC category for several countries in the past. Among them **Bhutan** is scheduled for graduation in 2023, while **Sao Tome and Principe** and **Solomon Islands** are slated for graduation in 2024. **Bangladesh, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic** and **Nepal** are scheduled for graduation in 2026.

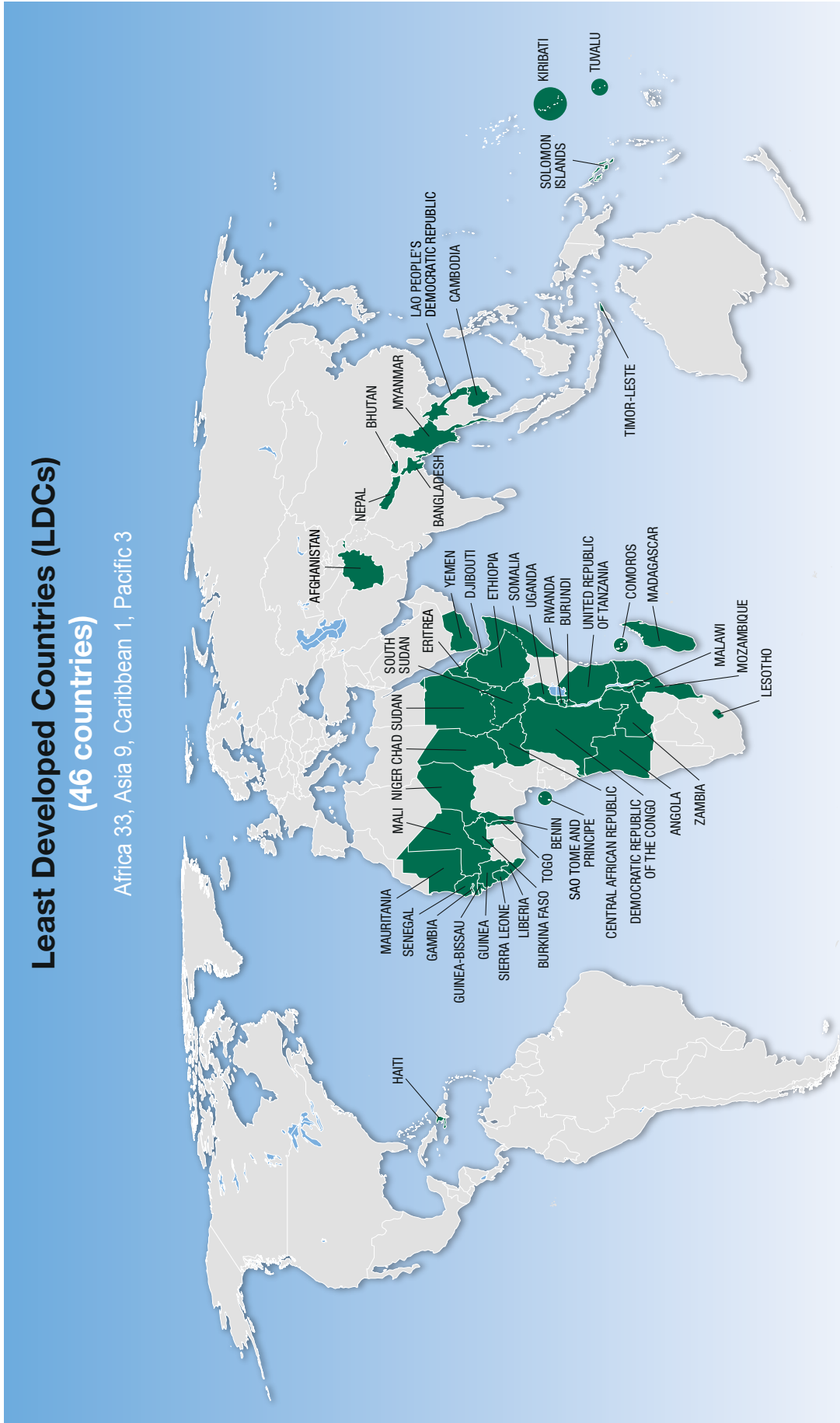
In the 2021 review of the list of LDCs, the following countries were found to have met the graduation thresholds for the first time: **Cambodia, the Comoros, Djibouti, Senegal** and **Zambia**. Djibouti met the “income-only” criterion; the Comoros, Senegal and Zambia met the graduation thresholds for two of the three criteria, namely income and human assets; and Cambodia met all three graduation criteria (income, human assets, and economic and environmental vulnerability). These countries are scheduled to be reviewed again in 2024 and, if they meet the criteria for a second time, could be recommended for graduation.

**Kiribati** and **Tuvalu** were recommended for graduation in 2018 and 2012, respectively, but ECOSOC deferred a decision on their graduation. In resolution 2021/11, ECOSOC, recalling its 2018 decision to defer the consideration of the graduation of Kiribati and Tuvalu to no later than 2021, recognized the unprecedented socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and decided to defer the consideration of their graduation until 2024.

During the triennial review of 2021, the CDP decided to defer its decision on the cases of **Myanmar** and **Timor-Leste** to the 2024 review.

## Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (46 countries)

Africa 33, Asia 9, Caribbean 1, Pacific 3



Note: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.  
Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties

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