

What are the least developed countries?

► 46 countries

As of 2021, forty-six 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.

► 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 report to the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** of the United Nations. Following a triennial review of the list, the CDP may recommend, in its report to ECOSOC, countries for addition to the list or graduation from LDC status.

Between 2017 and 2020 the CDP undertook a comprehensive review of the LDC criteria. The resulting revised criteria were first applied at the triennial review which took place in February 2021. The criteria and the thresholds for inclusion into the LDC category and for graduation from the category applied at the 2021 triennial review were as follows:

- (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. At the 2021 triennial review, the threshold for inclusion was \$1,018 or below; the threshold for graduation was \$1,222 or above;
- (b)** A **human assets index (HAI)**, consisting of two sub-indices: a health sub-index and an education sub-index. The health sub-index has three indicators: (i) the under-five mortality rate; (ii) the maternal mortality ratio; and (iii) the prevalence of stunting. The education sub-index has three indicators: (i) the gross secondary school enrolment ratio; (ii) the adult literacy rate; and (iii) the gender parity index for gross secondary school enrolment. All six indicators are converted into indices using established methodologies with an equal weight. The 2021 triennial review set the thresholds for inclusion and graduation at 60 or below and 66 or above, respectively.
- (c)** An **economic and environmental vulnerability index**, consisting of two sub-indices: an economic vulnerability sub-index and an environmental vulnerability sub-index. The economic vulnerability sub-index has four indicators: (i) share of agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing in GDP; (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 2021 triennial review set the thresholds for inclusion and graduation at 36 or above and 32 or below, respectively.

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 twice the graduation threshold (\$2,444 at the 2021 triennial review), becomes eligible for graduation, even if it fails to meet the other two criteria

► LDC graduation

Five 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; and
- **Vanuatu** in December 2020.

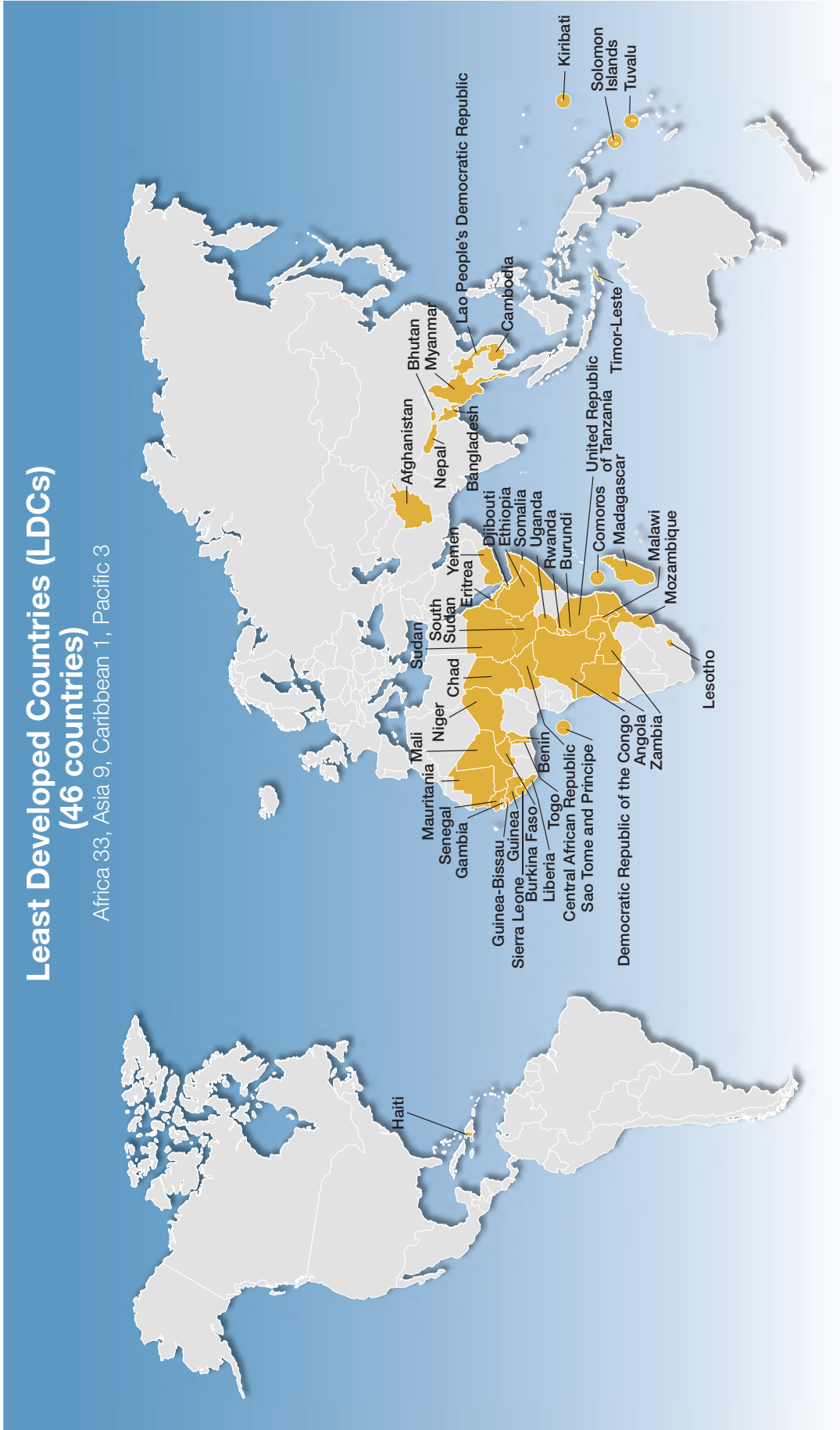
The CDP has recommended graduation from the LDC category for several countries in the past. Among them, **Bhutan** is scheduled for graduation in 2023, while **Sao Tome and Principe** and **Solomon Islands** are slated for graduation in 2024. **Angola** was expected to graduate in 2021, but in the wake of a prolonged recession, and the COVID-19 outbreak, the General Assembly decided on 11 February 2021 to grant Angola an additional preparatory period of three years; hence the country is also scheduled for graduation from LDC status in 2024. **Kiribati** and **Tuvalu** were recommended for graduation in 2018 and 2012 respectively but ECOSOC deferred a decision on their graduation in 2018. In 2021 the CDP reiterated its recommendation of graduation but proposed a preparatory period of five years for these two countries. In resolution 2021/11, ECOSOC, recalling its 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.

The CDP’s 2021 Triennial review considered for graduation from LDC status three countries (**Bangladesh**, **Lao People’s Democratic Republic** and **Myanmar**), which met the graduation criteria for the second time; and **Nepal** and **Timor-Leste**, which had met the graduation criteria for the second time in 2018, but for which the CDP had deferred its decision. The Committee recommended for graduation from the LDC category Bangladesh, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Nepal. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee recommended an extended preparatory period, as well as careful monitoring and analysis of the impacts of the pandemic, and specific transition support. The Committee decided to defer its decision on the cases of Myanmar and Timor-Leste to the CDP’s 2024 Triennial review. ECOSOC resolution 2021/11, issued on 8 June 2021, endorsed the CDP’s recommendation for all five countries. The General Assembly will consider the matter during its 76th session.

Lastly, in the CDP’s 2021 review of the list of LDCs, the following countries were found to have met the graduation thresholds for the first time: **Cambodia**, **Comoros**, **Djibouti**, **Senegal** and **Zambia**. Djibouti met the “income-only” criterion; 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 will be reviewed again in 2024 and, if they meet the criteria for a second time, could be recommended for graduation

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (46 countries)

Africa 33, Asia 9, Caribbean 1, Pacific 3



Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.