
Note on definition of regions for statistical analysis

Prepared by UNSD

1. Background

The need to define regional aggregations that would allow a meaningful statistical analysis has long been a concern of the international statistical community. This has become more evident with the new monitoring requirements and with the increasing demand for consistency in the analysis, presentation and reporting across the UN-system and other international agencies, on development issues.

A large number of official reports are produced every year by specialized agencies and other UN entities, which present country data according to a regional/geographical classification and often regional and sub-regional aggregates (based on average or other aggregation methods). Regional aggregates are a convenient way to show trends and assess progress over time and differences across the various areas of the world. However, practices vary among the various international agencies and regional groupings and classification of countries are based on different criteria. With the increasing use of statistics and statistical analysis by a large audience, including country delegations, policy makers, the media and the general public, a consistent use of nomenclature for geographical and other country groupings has become a real necessity.

This brief note describes the UN Statistics Division practices with country coding and regional grouping and the adaptation of these regional aggregates to the requirements of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) monitoring and reporting.

2. Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use

The *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use* (Series M, No.49/Rev 4), generally referred to as “M49”, presents a list of names of countries or areas used as a common reference for statistical processing purposes by the United Nations Statistics Division. Each country is assigned a *unique three-digit numerical code* by the Statistics Division and a *three-digit alphabetical code* by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The M49 system was first developed in 1969 to facilitate information transmission and the standardization of material for data processing, and has since evolved as an international standard coding system for other purposes outside statistical compiling and computing applications. The countries and areas listed in the *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use* are those for which data are normally provided for the statistical outputs of the Division.¹

¹ A complete list of countries and numerical and ALPHA-3 ISO codes is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>.

As a United Nations standard, the start-up process for official consideration may be granted only after a country has attained the stature and sovereignty required by the United Nations and the international community. The classification revision starts with the General Assembly resolution pertaining to an official announcement/proclamation of a new sovereign nation or an official change of name or area nomenclature. Country terminology is codified by the *United Nations Terminology Unit*, taking into account country views and decisions of inter-governmental bodies. For other entities, including sub-national entities, terminology is determined in consultation with Member States that might have an interest in the matter through the UN Secretariat's Office of Legal Affairs. The names of countries or areas refer to their short form used in day-to-day operations of the United Nations and not necessarily to their official name as used in formal documents.²

The first list of *Area Codes for Statistical Use* was printed in 1969 and revised in 1975, 1982, 1996, and 1999, the last major revision undertaken in all languages. At present, regular updates and maintenance are posted in both English and French at the UN Statistics Division website at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm>

2.1 Maintenance of the country list and coding

Regular updates and maintenance to the *country names* and *three-digit numerical* and *alpha codes* in the list of the *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use* are made only when the following situations occur (see Annex 1: Flowchart on “M49 Maintenance and update scenarios”):

- (1) An official change in the *name of country or area* while its geographical coverage remains the same. This change is not usually accompanied by a change of the country's numerical code, only by a change in the ISO alphabetic code (e.g. 854, BFA, Burkina Faso, previously listed as 854, HVO, Upper Volta)³.
- (2) A major change in the geographical coverage of a country or area. This is generally accompanied by a change in the *name of the country* and *numerical code* used for statistical purposes. Possible scenarios:
 - a) Two countries merge into one sovereign state as in the case of (276) Germany formerly (278) German Democratic Republic and (280) the Federal Republic of Germany.
 - b) A country may separate or dissolve as (890) the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where its states declared independence to become (070) Bosnia and Herzegovina (191) Croatia and (705) Slovenia.

² These names are based on Terminology Bulletin No. 347/Rev.1: Country Names. A comparative listing in the six official languages of the United Nations, in English alphabetical order, is contained in Terminology Bulletin No. 347/Rev.1: Country Names (United Nations publication, Sales No. A/C/E/F/R/S.97.I.19), prepared by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services of the United Nations Secretariat.

³ The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is primarily responsible for update and maintenance of the 3-alpha codes under ISO 3166.

- c) A country may secede, achieve independence or autonomy from another as the situation of (084) Belize which was formerly a colony of (826) United Kingdom.
- d) A sovereign country agrees and allows its autonomous entities or territories to provide their own data directly to the Statistical Division. Ex. (248) Aland Islands, a province of Finland.

These entities can therefore apply for their own unique *numerical code* and M49 inclusion if they meet the following criteria:

- a) Ability of the territory to provide sufficient and broad range of statistics for international use (data compliance to the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics (MBS) Questionnaire) and
- b) Clearance and official permission from the sovereign state allowing the territory to provide separate statistics for international reporting.

2.2 Partnership with ISO

The ISO is a non-governmental organization that promotes development of world standards with a view to facilitating international exchange of goods and services and to develop mutual co-operation in the sphere of intellectual, scientific, technological and economic activity. ISO 3166, *Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions* is a comprehensive and the most widely used standard solution for coding country names. The purpose of ISO 3166 is to establish codes for the representation of names of countries, territories or areas of geographical interest, and their subdivisions. In a special institutional and working arrangement with the UN Statistics Division, ISO 3166-1 uses the three-digit numerical country codes developed and maintained under the *UN Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (M49)*.

3. UN Statistics Division and Population Division geographical regions

The M49 also provides a classification of countries and areas by geographical regions and sub-regions. In order to ensure consistency in statistics and for convenience, all regions are mutually exclusive and therefore each country or area is shown in one region only. The macro geographical regions are arranged to the extent possible according to continents. Each large geographical region includes smaller sub-regions. The geographical regions and related codes are listed in Annex 2.

For statistical and analytical purposes, the United Nations Statistics Division and Population Division have also been using a classification based on a combination of geographical criteria and level of development. The basic regions and sub-regions defined according to the M49 are further aggregated on the basis of whether the regions are mostly composed of developing or developed countries. Although these designations are not intended to express a judgment about the actual stage of development that a country or area has reached and are not based on the performance of any specific economic indicators, they are a convenient way to present the analysis and the assessment of progress separately for those parts of the world where development is generally still a serious concern.

This further aggregation provides the following classification:

- (1) Developed regions:

Northern America
Europe
Japan
Australia and New Zealand

(2) Developing regions:

Africa (for statistical and analytical purposes Africa is generally divided into Northern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa)
Latin America and the Caribbean
Asia, excluding Japan
Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand

In addition, data generally are also presented for groups of countries with specific needs and circumstances. These are the following:

- (1) the Least Developed Countries, a group of countries, identified as being particularly vulnerable, with a low income level and a low index of human assets, based on nutrition, health and education;
- (2) the Landlocked Developing Countries, a group of countries constrained in their development by the lack of territorial access to the sea, remoteness and isolation from world markets and high transit costs; and
- (3) the Small Islands Developing States, a group of small islands developing states, with a narrow resource base, a small domestic markets, high costs for energy, infrastructure, transportation, communication and servicing, long distances from export markets and import resources, low and irregular international traffic volumes, little resilience to natural disasters and fragile natural environments.

4. Geographical regions for reporting on MDGs

At the December 2001 and March and April 2002 meetings of the Inter-agency and expert group on MDG Indicators (IAEG), the appropriate country/area classification for regional aggregates was discussed. The group agreed and affirmed that regional aggregates of agencies' series would conform as much as possible to the classification adopted by the United Nations Statistics and Population Division as described in the section above, based on a combination of geographical and level of development criteria. Many agencies followed this plan in preparing their series and statistical aggregates for use in the Secretary-General's monitoring report to the General Assembly already for the first round of reporting, five years ago. The remaining agencies followed the proposed classifications in the following years and have been consistently using the common classification ever since.

This has enabled the yearly reports to the General Assembly and all other reporting outputs as well as the MDG database, to present regional estimates on all MDG indicators according to a comparable classification. The importance of this harmonization is two-fold: first, to avoid confusing the user with varying classifications which are difficult to compare, and second and very substantively, to allow for interregional comparisons of regional aggregates of different indicators.

Moreover, several agencies members of the IAEG have been using the MDG regional classification for the presentation of the regional aggregates of the indicators under their responsibility even for reporting other than the official MDG outputs—for instance in their own publications and websites.

4.1 Steps in the definition of the MDG regions

The regions and sub-regions originally agreed upon by the IAEG in 2002 were as follows:

Developed regions:

Europe (including all transition countries in Europe)

Other regions (Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan)

Developing regions:

Northern Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa

Latin America and the Caribbean

Western Asia

South-central Asia

South-eastern Asia

Eastern Asia

Oceania

Transition countries (optional disaggregation):

Commonwealth of independent states

Other transition countries in Europe

After the agreed classification was used in 2002, however, some concerns were raised especially in relation to the “optional” disaggregation of transition countries and the inclusion of CIS countries in the regional groupings for Asia. One major concern was that by using the “Transition countries” disaggregation, the resulting groups were not mutually exclusive (countries in Asia could be both in the transition countries group and in the developing regions). Moreover, the Asian sub-regions including CIS countries, from the point of view of development and socio-economic circumstances, were more heterogeneous than all other developing regions.

The following modifications were then proposed and adopted in 2003:

- (1) To increase homogeneity within South-Central Asia and Western Asia, South and Central Asia were divided into two separate sub-regions and the three CIS countries were removed from Western Asia (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia);
- (2) Given the increasing differences between former Soviet Union countries (CIS) and other transition countries in Europe, a separate group for CIS was formed, which included both the CIS countries in Asia (the five in Central Asia and the three formerly in Western Asia) and the CIS in Europe. All other transition countries were left with the rest of Europe under “developed regions”.

The modifications resulted in the following new groupings⁴:

- Developed regions (all countries included in this group before, minus the four European CIS countries, now included in CIS Europe)
- CIS (countries members of CIS, including “CIS Europe”, the four CIS countries in Europe, and “CIS Asia”, the five countries formerly in South-Central Asia and the three formerly in Western Asia)
- Developing regions (all countries in the various geographical regions as in the previous classification, minus the five in Central Asia and the three CIS formerly in Western Asia)
- An optional sub-group for “developed regions”, including the transition countries in Europe, called “Transition countries of south-eastern Europe”, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Points for discussion

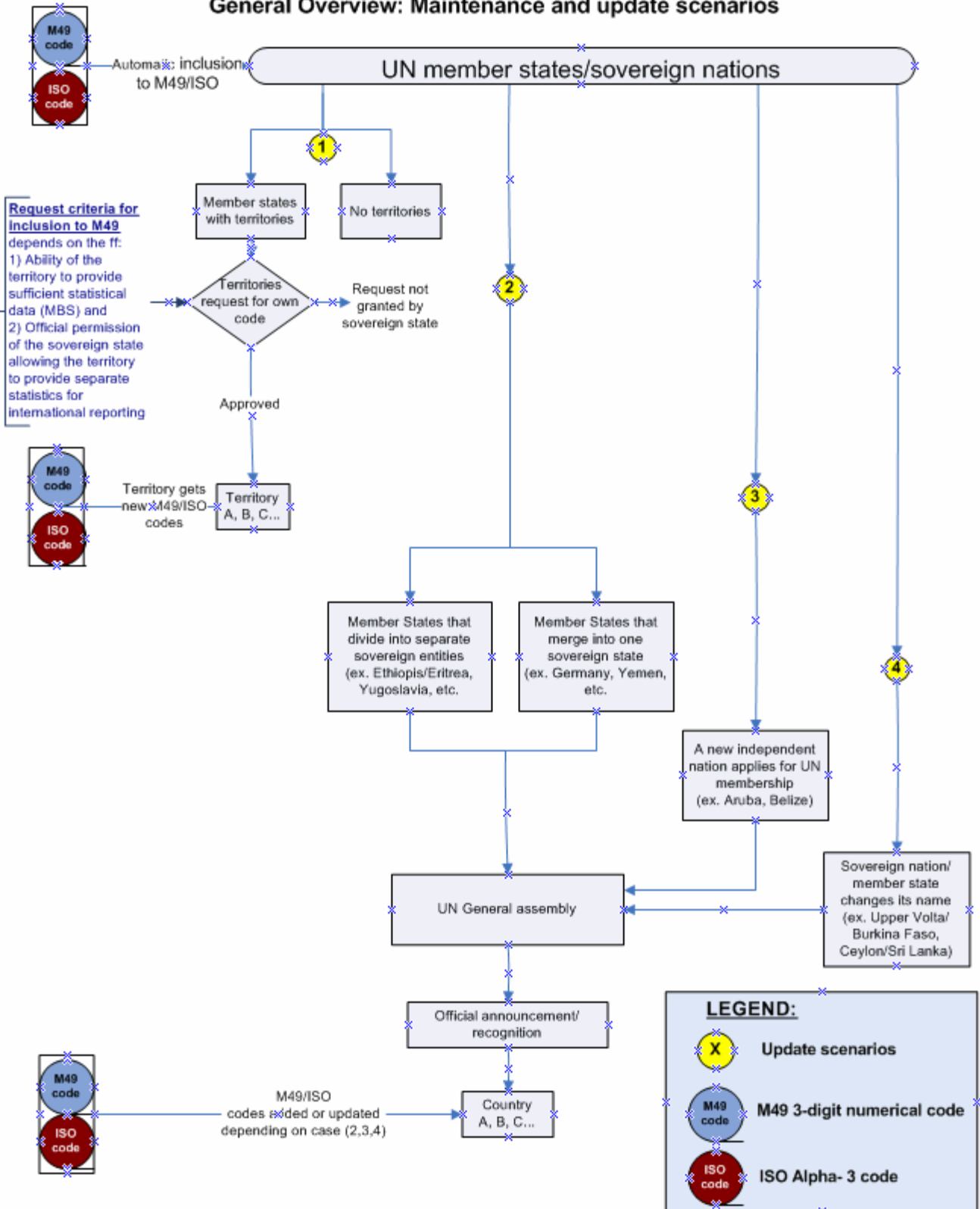
- Geographical groupings versus income-based classifications
- Possible revision of the classification of developing and developed regions
- Creation of an inventory of regions and their definitions aiming at having a situation where the name of a region or sub-region should correspond to the same composition across agencies

⁴ The composition of MDG regions and sub-regions is listed as Annex 3.

Annex 1

Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (M49)

General Overview: Maintenance and update scenarios



Annex 2 - Macro geographical (continental) regions and geographical sub-regions

Geographical regions

001 World

002 Africa a/

014 *Eastern Africa*

017 *Middle Africa*

015 *Northern Africa*

018 *Southern Africa*

011 *Western Africa*

019 Americas

419 **Latin America and the Caribbean**

029 *Caribbean*

013 *Central America*

005 *South America*

021 **Northern America** b/

142 Asia

143 *Central Asia*

030 *Eastern Asia*

034 *Southern Asia*

035 *South-Eastern Asia*

145 *Western Asia*

150 Europe

151 *Eastern Europe*

154 *Northern Europe*

039 *Southern Europe*

155 *Western Europe*

009 Oceania

053 *Australia and New Zealand*

054 *Melanesia*

057 *Micronesia*

061 *Polynesia*

Annex 3 - MDG Regional classification

<u>MDG regional classification</u>	World Bank - world by income	<u>MDG regional classification</u>	World Bank - world by income
514		392	High
Developed regions		428	Upper-middle
778		438	High
<i>Transition countries of south-eastern Europe ^{1/}</i>		440	Upper-middle
172		442	High
Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)		470	Upper-middle
515		492	High
Developing regions		528	High
015		554	High
<i>Northern Africa</i>		578	High
738		616	Upper-middle
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>		620	High
419		674	High
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>		703	Upper-middle
030		705	High
<i>Eastern Asia</i>		724	High
223		752	High
<i>Eastern Asia excluding China (optional)</i>		756	High
034		826	High
<i>South Asia</i>		840	High
035			
<i>South-eastern Asia</i>		778	
145			
<i>Western Asia</i>			
009			
<i>Oceania</i>			
<u>Official groupings</u>			
432			
Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs)			
722			
Small island developing States (SIDS)			
199			
Least developed countries (LDCs)			
<u>List of countries</u>			
514		008	Lower-middle
Developed regions		070	Lower-middle
020	High	100	Lower-middle
036	High	642	Lower-middle
040	High	891	Lower-middle
056	High	807	Lower-middle
060	High		
124	High	172	
830	High	Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	
191	Upper-middle	CIS in Europe	
203	Upper-middle	112	Lower-middle
208	High	498	Low
233	Upper-middle	643	Lower-middle
234	High	804	Low
246	High	CIS in Asia	
250	High	051	Low
276	High	031	Low
300	High	268	Low
304	High	398	Lower-middle
348	Upper-middle	417	Low
352	High	762	Low
372	High	795	Lower-middle
833	Upper-middle	860	Low
380	High		

MDG regional classification		WB - world by income	MDG regional classification		WB - world by income
515	Developing regions		678	Sao Tome & Principe	Low
015	Northern Africa		686	Senegal	Low
012	Algeria	Lower-middle	690	Seychelles	Upper-middle
818	Egypt	Lower-middle	694	Sierra Leone	Low
434	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Upper-middle	706	Somalia	Low
504	Morocco	Lower-middle	710	South Africa	Lower-middle
788	Tunisia	Lower-middle	736	Sudan	Low
732	Western Sahara		748	Swaziland	Lower-middle
738	Sub-Saharan Africa		768	Togo	Low
024	Angola	Low	800	Uganda	Low
204	Benin	Low	834	U. Rep of Tanzania	Low
072	Botswana	Upper-middle	894	Zambia	Low
854	Burkina Faso	Low	716	Zimbabwe	Low
108	Burundi	Low			
120	Cameroon	Low	419	Latin America & the Caribbean	
132	Cape Verde	Lower-middle	029	Caribbean ^{2/}	
140	Central African Rep	Low	660	Anguilla	
148	Chad	Low	028	Antigua and Barbuda	Upper-middle
174	Comoros	Low	533	Aruba	High
178	Congo	Low	044	Bahamas	High
384	Cote d'Ivoire	Low	052	Barbados	Upper-middle
180	Dem Rep of the Congo	Low	092	British Virgin Islands	
262	Djibouti	Lower-middle	136	Cayman Islands	High
226	Equatorial Guinea	Low	192	Cuba	Lower-middle
232	Eritrea	Low	212	Dominica	Upper-middle
231	Ethiopia	Low	214	Dominican Republic	Lower-middle
266	Gabon	Upper-middle	308	Grenada	Upper-middle
270	Gambia	Low	312	Guadeloupe	
288	Ghana	Low	332	Haiti	Low
324	Guinea	Low	388	Jamaica	Lower-middle
624	Guinea-Bissau	Low	474	Martinique	
404	Kenya	Low	500	Montserrat	
426	Lesotho	Low	530	Netherlands Antilles	High
430	Liberia	Low	630	Puerto Rico	Upper-middle
450	Madagascar	Low	659	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Upper-middle
454	Malawi	Low	662	Saint Lucia	Upper-middle
466	Mali	Low	670	St Vincent & the Grenadines	Lower-middle
478	Mauritania	Low	780	Trinidad and Tobago	Upper-middle
480	Mauritius	Upper-middle	796	Turks and Caicos Islands	
175	Mayotte	Upper-middle	850	US Virgin Islands	High
508	Mozambique	Low	420	Latin America	
516	Namibia	Lower-middle	032	Argentina	Upper-middle
562	Niger	Low	084	Belize	Lower-middle
566	Nigeria	Low	068	Bolivia	Lower-middle
638	Réunion	Low	076	Brazil	Upper-middle
646	Rwanda	Low	152	Chile	Upper-middle
			170	Colombia	Lower-middle
			188	Costa Rica	Upper-middle

MDG regional classification		WB - world by income	MDG regional classification		WB - world by income
218	Ecuador	Lower-middle	145	Western Asia	
222	El Salvador	Lower-middle	048	Bahrain	High
238	Falkland Is (Malvinas)		196	Cyprus	High
254	French Guiana		368	Iraq	Lower-middle
320	Guatemala	Lower-middle	376	Israel	High
328	Guyana	Lower-middle	400	Jordan	Lower-middle
340	Honduras	Lower-middle	414	Kuwait	High
484	Mexico	Upper-middle	422	Lebanon	Upper-middle
558	Nicaragua	Low		Occupied Palestinian Territory	Lower-middle
591	Panama	Upper-middle	275	Oman	Upper-middle
600	Paraguay	Lower-middle	512	Qatar	High
604	Peru	Lower-middle	634	Saudi Arabia	Upper-middle
740	Suriname	Lower-middle	682	Syrian Arab Republic	Lower-middle
858	Uruguay	Upper-middle	760	Turkey	Lower-middle
862	Venezuela	Upper-middle	792	United Arab Emirates	High
			784	Yemen	Low
			887		
030	Eastern Asia		009	Oceania	
156	China	Lower-middle	016	American Samoa	Upper-middle
344	Hong Kong SAR of China	High	184	Cook Is	
446	Macao SAR of China	High	242	Fiji	Lower-middle
408	Korea, Dem People's Rep of	Low	258	French Polynesia	High
410	Korea, Rep of	High	316	Guam	High
496	Mongolia	Low	296	Kiribati	Lower-middle
			584	Marshall Islands	Lower-middle
034	South Asia		583	Micronesia (Fed States of)	Lower-middle
004	Afghanistan	Low	520	Nauru	
050	Bangladesh	Low	570	Niue	
064	Bhutan	Low	540	New Caledonia	High
356	India	Low	580	Northern Mariana Is	High
364	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Lower-middle	585	Palau	Upper-middle
462	Maldives	Lower-middle	598	Papua New Guinea	Low
524	Nepal	Low	882	Samoa	Lower-middle
586	Pakistan	Low	090	Solomon Is	Low
144	Sri Lanka	Lower-middle	772	Tokelau	
			776	Tonga	Lower-middle
035	South-eastern Asia		798	Tuvalu	
096	Brunei Darussalam	High	548	Vanuatu	Lower-middle
116	Cambodia	Low			
360	Indonesia	Low			
418	Lao People's Dem Republic	Low			
		Upper-middle			
458	Malaysia	Upper-middle			
104	Myanmar	Low			
		Lower-middle			
608	Philippines	Lower-middle			
702	Singapore	High			
		Lower-middle			
764	Thailand	Lower-middle			
626	Timor-Leste	Low			
704	Viet Nam	Low			