

ISO-3166 – How Are Names Removed

1. Introduction

Considerable work has already been done within the community on the functioning of the ISO 3166 standard. The June 2017 final paper from the Cross-Community Working Group - Framework for use of Country and Territory Names as TLDs (CWG - UCTN)¹ did an excellent job of providing an overview of ISO 3166 and how the lists are developed and maintained. On June 29, the WG was presented with an in-depth "Introduction to ISO 3166"².

The objective of this paper is to build on and synthesize this work, with a focus on **who, how, when** and **why** country names and two character country codes are deleted from the ISO 3166 related lists.

2. The requirement to be listed on ISO 3166: RFC 1591.

According to RFC 1591 (section 3, The Administration of Delegated Domains)

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2. The Top Level Structure of the Domain Names

In the Domain Name System (DNS) naming of computers there is a hierarchy of names. The root of system is unnamed. There are a set of what are called "top-level domain names" (TLDs). These are the generic TLDs (EDU, COM, NET, ORG, GOV, MIL, and INT), and the two letter country codes from ISO-3166.....

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The country code domains (for example, FR, NL, KR,US) are each organized by an administrator for that country.

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Further:

3. The Administration of Delegated Domains

- 1) The key requirement is that for each domain there be a designated manager for supervising that domain's name space. In the case of top-level domains that are country codes this means that there is a manager that supervises the domain names and operates the domain name system in that country.

¹<https://ccnso.icann.org/workinggroups/ccwg-ctn-final-paper-15jun17-en.pdf>

² Available here <https://community.icann.org/download/attachments/66068428/Intro-MA3166.pdf?version=2&modificationDate=1498745767000&api=v2>

The manager must, of course, be on the Internet. There must be Internet Protocol (IP) connectivity to the nameservers and email connectivity to the management and staff of the manager.

There must be an administrative contact and a technical contact for each domain. For top-level domains that are country codes at least the administrative contact must reside in the country involved.

4. Rights to Names

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2) Country Codes

The IANA is not in the business of deciding what is and what is not a country.

The selection of the ISO 3166 list as a basis for country code top-level domain names was made with the knowledge that ISO has a procedure for determining which entities should be and should not be on that list.

The fundamental understanding for the use and reference to ISO 3166 is that there is a list that serves as a basis for country code top-level domain names and ISO has a procedure / process how names are added. Core concept pertaining to the delegation of a ccTLD is the link of a cc with a country as defined through ISO 3166. Note that the interpretation of this link has evolved over time, in particular on which the country code for the country or territory is listed and maintained.³

In the context of retirement of ccTLDs the assumption is that there is a process- how they are removed / deleted from the list.

Which list is meant, are there other lists?

What is process for removal / deletion from the list(s)?

3. What is the list of names of countries referred to in RFC 1591?

³ RFC 1591, grandfathering of pre- RFC 1591 anomalies, ICANN Board resolution September 2000
<https://www.icann.org/resources/board-material/minutes-2000-09-25-en>

In part 1 Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivision- Part 1: Country codes, different categories of lists are defined.

First of all, the List of country names in this part of ISO 3166 includes those required to satisfy the broadest possible range of applications. It is based on the list in the “Standard Country of Area Codes for Statistical Use” established by the United Nations Statistics Division.

This definition is further defined in Clause 6: **List of country names and their code elements**. Effectively it is the list of officially assigned codes⁴ and referred to in the Standard as Clause 9.

However, some codes currently in use as ccTLD are NOT listed in the List of country names and their codes, for example .uk and .eu. These codes are listed as one of the following categories and reserved by the MA:

Exceptionally reserved codes – codes that have been reserved for a particular use at special request of a national ISO member body, governments or international organizations. For example, the code UK has been reserved at the request of the United Kingdom so that it cannot be used for any other country.

Transitionally reserved codes – codes that are reserved during a transitional period while new code elements that may replace them are taken into use. This results from changes in the standard. For example, the country codes for the former Yugoslavia have been reserved when it was removed from ISO 3166-1.

Indeterminately reserved – a code that has been indeterminately reserved for use in a certain way. Usually this is justified by their presence in other coding systems. For example, several codes have been reserved by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) because they have been used in its Standard ST.3.

4. Adding and removing names of countries and country subdivisions

Role of the Maintenance Agency

The 3166/MA’s functions are set out in ISO 3166-1 Clause 7.1: A MA is established by the ISO Council to operate under guidelines approved by the Council and entrusted with following functions (***emphasis added***):

- a) to add ***and eliminate country and country subdivision names*** and to assign code elements as needed, ***in accordance with the rules in ISO 3166;***

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⁴ <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search>

- b) to update lists of country and country subdivision names, code elements and their definitions;
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- c) to administer the reservation of code elements.

The rules referred to under a) above are Section 7.2 and 7.3 of the Standard itself.

Adding and deleting names to list of country names

Additions to the list of country names (section 7.2)

Additions to the list of country names shall be made on the basis of information from United Nations Headquarters, or upon the request of a member of ISO 3166/MA. In the latter case, the ISO 3166/MA will decide upon the addition, on the basis of the justification given for the actual requirements for international interchange. Code elements will be allocated accordingly.

If a country name is not included in the list provided in the “Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use”, the ISO 3166/MA may assign the numeric code element from the series 900 - 999 which has been made available by the United Nations Statistics Division for this purpose.

Deletions from the list of country names (section 7.3)

Deletions from the list of country names shall be made on the basis of information from United Nations Headquarters, or upon the request of a member of ISO 3166/MA. The ISO 3166/MA shall decide upon the deletion, on the basis of the information given.

ISO 3166-3 provides the list of country names deleted in this part of ISO 3166 since its first edition in 1974”⁵

Country names might be removed from ISO 3166-1 for various reasons⁶

⁵ *Ibid* page 9

⁶ <https://www.iso.org/glossary-for-iso-3166.html>

- A country might change a significant part of its name, for example Burma (BU) was changed to Myanmar (MM) in 1989. The code element for the formerly used country name is therefore BUMM.
- A country may divide into two or more new ones, for example Czechoslovakia was divided into Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. The code element for the formerly used country name Czechoslovakia is CSHH, HH meaning that no single successor country exists.
- Two or more countries may merge for example Democratic Yemen (YD) and Yemen Arab Republic (YE) merged into the Republic of Yemen (YE) in 1990. The code element used for the formerly used country name Democratic Yemen is YDYE.

Given that not only the list of country names is used, but also some codes listed as exceptionally reserved, the rules in the Standard around the **reservation of code elements** are relevant.

Reserving codes

According to the Standard (section 7.5.1) some code elements are reserved

- for a limited period when their reservation is the result of the deletion (7.3) or alteration (7.4) of a country name
- For an indeterminate period of when the reservation is the result of the application of international law or of exceptional requests.

Reservation period

Code elements that the MA has altered or deleted should not be reallocated during a period of at least fifty years after the change. The exact period is determined in each case on the basis of the extent to which the former code element was used (section 7.5.).

Note that the terminology used in the reservation period language is different from the language with respect to adding or deleting names of countries. In the rules with respect to reserving codes it is not imperative/ categorical (should versus shall).

Past experience has shown that the MA has re-assigned codes well before the term of 50 years has ended. The best-known case, which was introduced in Johannesburg, was the re-assignments of cs.

Also note that code elements are reserved. A code element is defined as: **the result of applying a code to an element of coded set**. Note in (this part of) ISO 3166, a code element represents a country name

In addition, codes that do not represent a country name in the standard but that have been reserved for a certain use are reserved, i.e. while a code is reserved it will not be used in the standard to represent a country.

Summary

The Maintainer Agency (MA) is key to understanding how country codes get added and removed from the three parts of ISO 3166. Where a country has been renamed or ceased to exist under its old name, the MA **shall** remove the country code from the 3166-1 list while simultaneously it **should** be adding it to the reserved codes. Changes to 3166-1 are effective 'immediately upon publication'. At one time, the ISO used to announce changes to all of its standards in newsletters which updated the currently valid standard, and by releasing new editions which comprised a consolidation of newsletter changes. However, as of July 2013, changes are published in the online catalogue of ISO only and no newsletters are published anymore. It is not clear if there is a 'publication date' associated with this online publication.