

2. Product classification for WTO trade statistics and policy analysis – Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN) Categories

2.1 Overview

The WTO's Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN) Categories is the product classification system used by the WTO for trade statistics and policy analysis. The system allows trade negotiators, policy makers and researchers to use common terminology to interpret trade trends and to analyse policy measures, such as tariffs, for various products.

The MTN Categories consist of broad product groups defined according to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS or Harmonized System) used for traded goods. The categories were initially established during the Tokyo Round in the mid-1970s and were employed in particular in the Uruguay Round multilateral trade negotiations.¹

Since then, they have become an indispensable tool for analytical work at the WTO. The categories facilitate the evaluation of trade negotiation outcomes, analysis of changes in tariffs and other trade-related policies, and the compilation of trade statistics across various economic sectors. They are commonly used in WTO publications and documents.

2.2 Background

Tokyo Round

The origins of the MTN Categories can be traced back to a report published in January 1980 by the Director-General of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which outlined the outcomes of the Tokyo Round trade negotiations (1973-79).² The report presented the negotiated tariff reductions across ten industrial product categories:

- Wood, pulp, paper, and furniture
- Textiles and clothing
- Leather, rubber, footwear and travel goods
- Base metals
- Chemicals (including photographic supplies)
- Transport equipment
- Non-electric machinery
- Electric machinery
- Mineral, precious stones and metals
- Manufactured articles n.e.s.

Uruguay Round

During the Uruguay Round (1986-94), the same ten industrial categories were used along with "fish and fish products" to review the outcomes of tariff reductions.³ Furthermore, ten agricultural product categories were added to the industrial categories.

- Fruit and vegetables
- Coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, etc.
- Grains
- Animals and products thereof
- Oilseeds, fats and oils and their products
- Cut flowers, plants, vegetable materials; lacs, gums, etc.
- Beverages and spirits
- Dairy products
- Tobacco
- Other agricultural products

The industrial and agricultural product categories established during the Uruguay Round have been widely used in analyses of market access negotiations ever since. In 1993, the GATT Secretariat conducted a study on these product categories, identifying sectors where the export interests of developing economies were concentrated.⁴ The study also analyzed the average tariff reductions of developed economies, looking into imports from developing economies in each sector.

In December 1993, the Negotiating Group on Market Access published a review of proposed concessions by members, which presented a series of indicators calculated for each industrial and agricultural category.⁵ These categories were also used to evaluate the final outcomes of the Uruguay Round in 1994.⁶



Doha Round

The industrial and agricultural categories established during the Uruguay Round have continued to be the standard terms of reference for trade analysis by the WTO Secretariat. At the beginning of the Doha Round, they provided a framework to describe trade volume and tariff levels across various product sectors. This laid the foundation for further negotiations on trade opening.

In 2001, the WTO Secretariat published “Market Access: Unfinished Business,” which referred to these categories as the “Multilateral Trade Negotiations Agricultural/Industrial Product Categories” and MTN Categories. Since then, several improvements have been made to these categories. One significant enhancement was the addition of “petroleum”⁷ to ensure comprehensive product coverage. Additionally, modifications were made to several agricultural categories to better reflect evolving trade patterns.⁸

2006 version

Since 2006, the MTN Categories have been the primary way to present trade flow statistics and tariff information in “World Tariff Profiles”. The 2006 version of the Categories introduced several adjustments to address emerging issues and to enhance accuracy.

Under agricultural products, a separate category was created for “cotton” while “cut flowers, plants, vegetable materials” were merged with “fruits and vegetables.” “Grains” were combined with “cereals”, and “other food preparations” and “spices” were moved to “other agricultural products.” For non-agricultural products, “metals” was merged with “mineral products and precious stones/metals”, and “textiles and clothing” were divided into two separate categories.

The 2006 version consists of a total of 22 categories. These adjustments have further enhanced the usefulness of the MTN Categories as a tool for analyzing international trade trends and patterns.

2023 version

In 2021, the WTO Secretariat initiated a project aimed at enhancing the MTN Categories, which resulted in the 2023 version. The review process led to the creation of a new two-level structure comprising 22 MTN Categories that closely resemble the previous categories. In addition, 72 MTN sub-categories were introduced to provide more detailed information, allowing for more precise analysis of trade patterns.

This updated structure allows for a more nuanced understanding of trade dynamics. The definition of MTN Categories and sub-categories has undergone careful examination and adjustment to ensure accurate representation of current trading patterns. Furthermore, a coding system has been introduced to enhance the usability of the categories and sub-categories, facilitating their use.

2.3 Structure

The MTN Categories play a vital role in the analysis of trade flows, tariffs and other trade policies. Their relatively simple structure aligns with broad economic sectors, providing a useful sector-based overview for trade policy discussions and negotiations. However, their limited level of detail can sometimes hinder their usefulness for broader purposes such as trade monitoring and product analysis.

To overcome this limitation, the introduction of sub-categories provides more detailed groupings where necessary. The first level consists of 22 categories, which are mostly identical to those in the 2006 version. Eighteen of these categories have been further divided into 68 sub-categories, providing a more refined level of analysis. To ensure completeness, the MTN Categories without subdivisions are repeated in the second level, resulting in a total of 72 sub-categories. This updated structure allows for a more detailed analysis, facilitating a nuanced understanding of trade patterns and policy impacts.

The new coding system for the MTN Categories utilizes letters from A to V while the MTN sub-categories incorporate a two-figure code as a suffix, resulting in a three-digit code that combines one letter and two figures. This coding system enhances the usability of the MTN Categories and sub-categories, allowing for easier analysis and comparison of trade policies and trends across various product sectors.

The definition of MTN Categories and sub-categories are based on the codes of chapters, headings or sub-headings in the Harmonized System. In the 2023 version, these categories and sub-categories align with HS 2022, as detailed below. The definition ensures that each six-digit HS code is assigned to only one sub-category and category. As a result, it avoids any overlap in HS coverage between MTN Categories and sub-categories, maintaining consistency in statistical calculations. For instance, the total trade value of all products is equal to the sum of the values of all MTN Categories (or sub-categories).

In addition to the Harmonized System (HS), other international product classifications such as the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC)⁹ and, to a lesser extent, the Central Product Classification (CPC)¹⁰ were used as general references during the development of the MTN Categories. These classifications provided additional guidance and insights for creating meaningful product groupings.

To ensure the significance of the sub-categories in terms of trade volume, each MTN sub-category has been carefully designed to encompass at least US\$ 6 billion of world imports annually. This threshold ensures that the sub-categories offer a sufficient level of detail while remaining relevant and valuable for analyzing international trade trends.¹¹

MTN categories and subcategories		
MTN Category code →	A	Live animals and meat ← MTN category description
		A01 Live animals, excluding fish
		A02 Meat, including preserved meat
	B	Dairy products
		B00 Dairy products
MTN sub-category code →	C	Fruits and vegetables
		C01 Fruits ← MTN subcategory description
		C02 Vegetables
		C03 Fruit and vegetable preparations
	D	Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices
		D01 Coffee, tea, mate
		D02 Cocoa and cocoa preparations
		D03 Spices
	E	Cereals and food preparations
		E01 Cereals
		E02 Food preparations.

2.4 Revisions and maintenance

The maintenance of the MTN Categories is carried out by the Economic Research and Statistics Division of the WTO Secretariat. To support time series analysis, a consistent correspondence between MTN Categories/sub-categories and the HS six-digit codes has been established for each version of the Harmonized System, such as HS1996, HS2002, HS2007, HS2012, HS2017 and future versions. This correspondence will continue to be updated with each new version of the HS.

The MTN Categories and sub-categories will be adjusted over time to reflect changes in merchandise trade patterns. This includes considering comments and suggestions received from relevant experts to ensure the relevance and accuracy of the classification. As international trade evolves, the MTN classification will be adapted accordingly to provide a reliable framework for trade analysis and policy evaluation.

The correlation table between the MTN Categories and the Harmonized System is available on the WTO website at <https://stats.wto.org/>.

Questions or other comments concerning the MTN Categories should be addressed to:

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2.5 MTN Categories in HS2022

MTN Categories and subcategories		Harmonized System 2022
A	Live animals and meat	
A01	Live animals, excluding fish	Ch 01
A02	Meat	Ch 02 (except 0209), 1601, 1602; subheading 0410.10
B	Dairy products	
B00	Dairy products	Headings 0401-0406, 2105, 3501; subheading 3502.20
C	Fruits and vegetables	
C01	Fruits	Ch 08
C02	Vegetables	Ch 07
C03	Fruit and vegetable preparations	Ch 20 (except 2009), headings 1105, 1106, 1903, subheading 2103.20
D	Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	
D01	Coffee, tea, mate	Headings 0901-0903, 2101
D02	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	Ch 18
D03	Spices	Ch 09 (except 0901-0903)
E	Cereals and food preparations	
E01	Cereals	Ch 10, 11 (except 1105, 1106)
E02	Food preparations	Ch 19 (except 1903), 21 (except 2101, 2105, 2103.20); heading 2209
F	Oilseeds, fats and oils	
F01	Oilseeds	Headings 1201-1207
F02	Animal fats and oils	Headings 0209, 1501-1506 (except 1504.10, 1504.20), 1518; subheadings 1516.10, 1521.90
F03	Vegetable fats and oils	Headings 1507-1517 (except 1516.10), 1520-1522 (except 1521.90)
G	Sugars and confectionery	
G00	Sugars and confectionery	Ch 17
H	Beverages and tobacco	
H01	Non-alcoholic beverages, including juices	Headings 2009, 2201, 2202
H02	Alcohols	Headings 2203-2208
H03	Tobacco and tobacco products	Ch 24 (except 2404.12, 2404.92, 2404.99)
I	Cotton, silk and wool	
I01	Cotton	Headings 5201-5203
I02	Silk and wool	Headings 5001-5003, 5101-5103, 5301, 5302
J	Other agricultural products	
J01	Plants, parts, extracts and vegetal materials	Ch 06, 13, 14, heading 1209-1214
J02	Chemicals from agricultural origin	Headings 3301, 3503-3505, 3823; subheadings 2905.43-2905.45, 3502.90, 3809.10, 3824.60
J03	Residues of food processing industry	Headings 1208, 2301-2309 (except 2301.20)
J04	Other products of animal origin	Ch 05 (except 0508.00, 0511.91); headings 0407-0410 (except 0410.10), 4101-4103, 4301; subheadings 3502.11, 3502.19
K	Fish and fish products	
K00	Fish and fish products	Ch 03, 16 (except 1601, 1602); heading 0508; subheadings 0511.91, 1504.10, 1504.20, 2301.20

MTN Categories and subcategories		Harmonized System 2022
L	Minerals and metals	
L01	Mineral fuels, other than petroleum oils	Ch 27 (except 2709, 2710, 2716)
L02	Other minerals	Ch 25, 26
L03	Non-metallic mineral products	Ch 68, 69, 70 (except 7019.11-7019.13, 7019.61, 7019.63-7019.69); headings 7102 (except 7102.39), 7104 (except 7104.91, 7104.99); subheading 7103.10
L04	Jewellery and related products	Headings 7101, 7103 (except 7103.10), 7105, 7113-7117 (except 7115.10); subheadings 7102.39, 7104.91, 7104.99
L05	Non-ferrous metals	Ch 74-81; headings 7106-7112
L06	Iron and steel	Ch 72, 73 (excluding 7321, 7322)
L07	Metal products	Ch 82, 83 (except 8304, 8305); heading 7118; subheading 7115.10
M	Petroleum	
M01	Crude oils	Headings 2709
M02	Petroleum oils, other than crude	Headings 2710
N	Chemicals	
N01	Inorganic chemicals	Ch 28
N02	Organic chemicals	Ch 29 (except 2905.43-2905.45, 2936, 2937, 2939, 2941)
N03	Pharmaceuticals	Ch 30; headings 2936, 2937, 2939, 2941
N04	Plastics	Ch 39
N05	Fertilisers	Ch 31
N09	Other chemical products	Ch 32, 33 (except 3301, 3306.20), 34 (except 3406), 36 (except 3605, 3606), 37, 38 (except 3809.10, 3823, 3824.60); headings 3506, 3507; subheadings 2404.12, 2404.92, 2404.99
O	Wood, paper, furniture	
O01	Wood and wood products	Ch 44-46
O02	Pulp, paper and printed matter	Ch 47-49
O03	Furniture	9401-9404 (except 9402.90, 9404.30-9404.90)
P	Textiles	
P01	Natural fibre, yarn and fabrics	Ch 50 (except 5001-5003), 51 (except 5101-5103), 52 (except 5201-5203), 53 (except 5301, 5302)
P02	Man-made fibre, yarn and fabrics	Ch 54, 55
P09	Other textile products	Ch 56-60, 63, 65 (except 6506, 6507); headings 6601, 8804; subheadings 3306.20, 4202.12, 4202.22, 4202.32, 4202.92, 7019.11-7019.13, 7019.61, 7019.63-7019.69, 9404.30-9404.90, 9612.10
Q	Clothing	
Q00	Clothing	Ch 61, 62
R	Rubber, leather and footwear	
R01	Rubber and rubber products	Ch 40
R02	Leather and leather products	Ch 41 (except 4101-4103), 42 (except 4202.12, 4202.22, 4202.32, 4202.92, 4206.00), 43 (except 4301)
R03	Footwear	Ch 64
S	Mechanical, office and computing machinery	
S01	General industrial machinery	Headings 8405, 8413-8428 (except 8414.51, 8414.60, 8418.10-8418.40, 8419.11-8419.20, 8422.11, 8423.10), 8431 (except 8431.41-8431.49), 8467 (except 8467.21-8467.29), 8476, 8480-8484, 8487
S02	Machinery for specialized industries	Headings 8429-8449 (except 8431.10-8431.39, 8443.31-8443.39, 8443.99), 8451-8466 (except 8451.21, 8452.10), 8468, 8472 (except 8472.90), 8474, 8475, 8477-8479, 8485, 8486; subheadings 8467.21-8467.29
S03	Power generating machinery	Headings 8401, 8402, 8404, 8406-8412
S04	Computers and office machinery	Headings 8470, 8471, 8473; subheadings 8443.31-8443.39, 8443.99, 8472.90, 8528.42, 8528.52, 8528.62

MTN Categories and subcategories		Harmonized System 2022
T	Electrical machinery and electronic equipment	
	T01	Electrical machinery Headings 8501-8507, 8511-8515, 8531, 8535-8539, 8540 (except 8540.11-8540.60), 8543-8549 (except 8544.70)
	T02	Electronic components Headings 8532-8534; subheading 8523.52
	T03	Semiconductors Headings 8541, 8542
	T04	Telecommunication equipment Headings 8517, 8518, 8524, 8526, 8529, 8530; subheading 8544.70
	T05	Audio-visual devices Headings 8519-8523 (except 8523.52), 8525, 8527, 8528 (except 8528.42, 8528.52, 8528.62); subheadings 8540.11-8540.60
	T06	Domestic appliances Headings 7321, 7322, 8403, 8450, 8508-8510, 8516; subheadings 8414.51, 8414.60, 8418.10-8418.40, 8419.11-8419.19, 8422.11, 8423.10, 8451.21, 8452.10
U	Transport equipment	
	U01	Motor vehicles Headings 8702-8708 (except 8707.90)
	U02	Railway vehicles Ch 86
	U03	Ships and floating structures Ch 89
	U04	Aircraft Ch 88 (except 8804)
	U05	Bicycles, motorcycles and other transport equipment Headings 8701, 8709, 8711-8714, 8716; subheading 8707.90
V	Other Manufactures	
	V01	Optical and photographic products Headings 9001-9013
	V02	Measuring instruments Headings 9014-9017, 9024-9033
	V03	Medical equipment Headings 9018-9022 (except 9022.19, 9022.29); subheadings 8419.20, 9402.90
	V04	Clocks and watches Ch 91
	V05	Arms and ammunition Ch 93; heading 8710
	V06	Recreational and sports products Ch 95
	V09	Other manufactures Ch 66 (except 6601), 67, 92, 96 (except 9612.10), 97, Headings 2716, 3406, 3605, 3606, 4206, 6506, 6507, 6602, 6603, 8304, 8305, 8715, 9023, 9405, 9406; subheading 9022.19, 9022.29

Endnotes

The evolution of market access over 16 years of "World Tariff Profiles"

1. The analysis is based on a complete series of 130 economies' data up to 2021, including data from World Tariff Profiles 2022. All figures presented are simple averages. Ad valorem equivalent tariffs of specific tariffs have been taken into account. Economies are classified into groups based on their development status and geographical regions following the UNCTAD definitions.
2. Source: WTO, ITC and UNCTAD databases.

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1. Prior to the Harmonized System (HS), the MTN Categories were defined according to the Customs Cooperation Council Nomenclature (CCCN), the predecessor of the HS.
2. GATT – The Tokyo Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations – Volume 2 – Supplementary Report -Geneva – January 1980.
3. Fish and fish products are treated as non-agricultural products according to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.
4. An analysis of the proposed Uruguay Round agreement, with particular emphasis on aspects of interest to developing economies (MTN.TNC/W/122 and MTN.GNG/W/30, November 1993).
5. Negotiating Group on Market Access – Overall review and assessment of draft schedules of concessions (GATT 2683, December 1993).
6. GATT Secretariat, The results of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (November 1994).
7. During the Tokyo Round, petroleum products were excluded from all calculations because it was considered that trade in this product was not affected by the duty levels.
8. The category "grains" was merged with "cereals and cereal preparations" while "animals and products thereof" was renamed as "meat and meat preparations"; a special category was created for "sugar and sugar confectionary", while "tobacco" does not exist anymore as a separate category.
9. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/sitcrev4.htm>
10. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/cpc>
11. Based on the average annual imports in 2017-20.