

WHAT IS UNGEGN AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

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Participation in UNGEGN

UNGEGN is composed of individuals, mainly from government or universities, representing UN Member States. These experts in the standardization of geographical names contribute from various fields of knowledge and skills, such as geography, history, linguistics, geospatial sciences, information management, technology and administration.

The establishment of UNGEGN

“What is the standardized way of writing geographical names?” This was raised by the United Nations Cartographic Section of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the late 1940s. It was discussed in the 1950s and in response to ECOSOC resolution 715A (XXVII) of 1959, the first meeting of a group of experts was convened in New York in 1960. This group recommended that a UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be held. In 1967 this took place in Geneva, with the confirmation that national standardization should be the basis of international standardization.

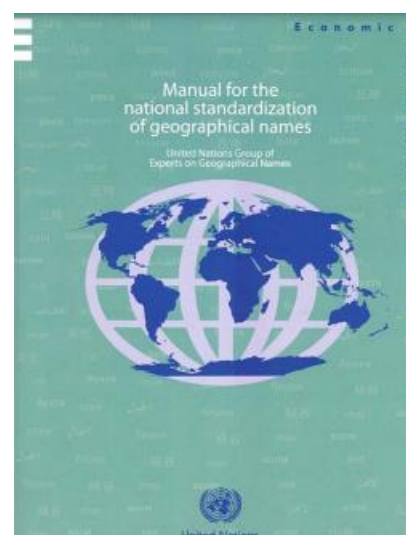
The mandate and role of UNGEGN in promoting the standardization of geographical names

UNGEGN is an expert body of ECOSOC.

- UNGEGN is mandated to follow up on the implementation of its resolutions and decisions and to continue activities between the plenary sessions of UNGEGN held every two years
- UNGEGN aims to emphasize and demonstrate the importance of the standardization of geographical names at the national and international levels and to assist countries in achieving standardization of geographical names.
- UNGEGN facilitates and encourages: the discussion of the results of work on national standardization and arising issues, the dissemination of good practices, and a wide user community awareness of nationally authorized geographical names.

Some examples of progress in recent years:

- Offering training (e.g. field collection of names, processing the data, creating databases and producing gazetteers, establishing national names authorities). Recent courses have been offered in countries of Africa, Europe and Southeast Asia, as well as Brazil and Australia. An online training course has been established in conjunction with the International Cartographic Association (see https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/data_ICAcourses/index.html). Webinars are now being offered to elaborate on aspects of geographical names standardization.
- Publications of UNGEGN:
 - A basic manual on setting up a national programme for the administration of a country's geographical names ([*Manual for the national standardization of geographical names \(English version\)*](#)). New texts addressing major issues of standardization are planned.
 - A technical manual with character sets for world languages, romanization systems and country names in the language(s) of the countries themselves ([*Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names \(English version\)*](#)). An update has been made.
 - A multi-chapter advanced toponymy training manual, ([*Toponymy training manual \(English version\)*](#))
 - A glossary of terms used in the standardization of toponyms ([*Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names \(Multilingual version\)*](#)), with the subsequent development of an online database of terms



- [Brochures](#) (*English version*) indicating the benefits of consistent and unambiguous toponyms, and describing the use of names as keys to access georeferenced information
- Scientifically-based romanization systems have been approved for 30 writing systems and work with UN Member States is ongoing to approve further systems.
- Activities for countries in Africa have been coordinated and promoted since 2004, for example:
 - Advocacy through coordination with other international organizations in Africa
 - Promotion through presentations at conferences in Africa
 - Cooperating with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) towards an Africa Gazetteer/database model
 - Convening the 25th UNGEGN Session in Nairobi in 2009
 - Offering training courses in toponymic administration for Africa (e.g. in Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Cameroon, Madagascar)
 - Developing an action plan with UNECA leadership (Gaborone Action Plan, 2011)
- Examples of projects through Divisions and their regional meetings:
 - Dutch- and German-speaking Division – publications from meetings on cultural heritage, exonyms, minority languages
 - China Division – addressing the training necessary to process some 20,000 new urban names annually
 - Norden Division (Scandinavian countries) – jointly encouraging the recording of Saami names in Norway, Sweden and Finland
- Web-based UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database including multilingual, multiscriptual data on names of countries, capitals and cities with a population over 100,000.



UNEGN provides a forum for discussion of good practices and methods, and for passing on information about national and regional projects

Examples include:

- island naming (some 17,000) in Indonesia
- recognition of cultural heritage - China, Sweden, Austria
- municipality amalgamation and name changes in Japan
- recognition of indigenous names – Canada, Australia, New Zealand
- recording and use of minority group names in the Netherlands, Spain
- processes for public participation in naming in South Africa and New Zealand
- development of geographical names databases as part of spatial data infrastructure – Finland, Germany
- integrating geographical names in both mapping and statistical use – Brazil, Egypt, Mexico
- geographical names and the coronavirus pandemic – Saudi Arabia, Indonesia
- the role of names in sustainable tourism – Colombia, Cyprus, Jordan

Other groups collaborate with UNGEGN to encourage widespread use of the standardized geographical names as promoted by UNGEGN

For example: United Nations Second Administrative Level Boundary (UN SALB) project; Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (UN OCHA); International Hydrographic Organization (IHO); International Organization for Standardization (ISO); Google; International Map Industry Association (IMIA) and various atlas and reference book editors.