

29 April 2021

English

**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names**

2021 session

Virtual, 3 – 7 May 2021

Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda *

**Cooperation and liaison with other organisations:
Economic Commission for Africa and Committee of Experts
on Global Geospatial Information Management.**

Report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

Submitted by the secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial
Information Management **

Summary

The secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has the honour of bringing to the attention of the Group of Experts the report prepared by the secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management on its activities relevant to the work of the Group of Experts. The Group of Experts is invited to review the report and express its views on the efforts to strengthen collaboration on furthering the standardization of geographical names.

At its ninth and tenth sessions, held from 7 to 9 August 2019, and on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, respectively, the Committee of Experts welcomed the report of the Group of Experts (see [E/C.20/2020/17/Add.1](#) and [E/C.20/2020/34/Add.1](#)). In 2019, the Committee affirmed the importance of strengthened collaboration between it and the Group of Experts, and suggested for consideration supporting the development of relevant strategic pathways of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, capacity-building, and education and research initiatives, including with the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Academic Network. In 2020, the Committee congratulated the Group of Experts on its efforts to develop a strategic plan and programme of work in a transparent manner and aligned to the priorities of Member States as well as the broader United Nations development agenda. In addition, the Committee supported the establishment of a liaison group between it and the Group of Experts to act as a guiding mechanism to manage the flow of information between the two bodies and to continue to identify areas of joint work, and welcomed the proposal to convene a joint meeting of the Bureaux of the Committee and the Group of Experts early in 2021.

* GEGN.2/2021/1

** Prepared by the secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

cThe full report provides a summary of relevant activities since the ninth session of the Committee of Experts, in particular the work being done with regard to the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework; an overview of activities of its regional committees and expert and working groups that are relevant to the standardization of geographical names; and an overview of relevant highlights of the virtual High-Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, held in May and June 2020

I. Background

1. This report describes the activities conducted by the Committee of Experts in the intersessional period between the Group of Experts' first and second meetings. This includes the ninth and tenth sessions of the Committee of Experts and details relevant efforts within the Committee's functional groups. The report also identifies issues for consideration.

II. Overview of activities of the Committee of Experts in the intersessional period

2. At its ninth session, held in New York from 1-3 August 2019, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 9/114, which welcomed the Group of Experts' report, acknowledging their efforts to strengthen its relationship with the Committee and to identify items for collaborative work. The Committee affirmed the importance of strengthened collaboration between the Committee and the Group of Experts, and noted the special role that the Group had to play in the specialised areas of geographic names, including on romanisation, linguistics, culture and history. The Committee acknowledged the importance of regular communications between the Bureau of the Committee and the Bureau of the Group of Experts to support the development of their respective strategic plans and the creation of geographical names authorities where they do not presently exist. The Committee noted that strengthened collaboration and mutual representation between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts was most effective at the national level, and encouraged increased communication between geospatial information management authorities and geographical names authorities. Finally, the Committee of Experts suggested, for consideration, possible areas of collaborative work at the global level, which would include supporting the development of relevant strategic pathways of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF), capacity-building, and education and research initiatives, including with the Committee's Academic Network.

3. At its tenth session on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee welcomed the report¹ of the Group of Experts and congratulated the Group on its efforts to develop a strategic plan and programme of work in a transparent manner and aligned to the priorities of Member States as well as the broader United Nations development agenda. The Committee of Experts acknowledged the commitment of Member States, and of its Regional Committees, to actively contribute to and support the Group of Experts in advancing the preparation and execution of its programme of work, including the standardisation, discovery and easy access to geographical names, which were vital in today's highly globalised and digitally interconnected world. To strengthen communication and collaborative activities between geospatial information management authorities and geographical names authorities at the national level and across themes, including creating awareness on toponymy and sharing guidelines, methods, and practices on the standardisation of geographical names, the Committee reaffirmed the importance of a stronger relationship between the Committee and the Group of Experts. Moreover, the Committee also supported the establishment of a liaison group between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts to act as a guiding mechanism to manage the flow of information between the two bodies and to continue to identify areas of joint work. It also welcomed the proposal to convene a joint meeting of the Bureau of the Committee and the Bureau of the Group in early 2021. The Committee of Experts supported efforts by Member States, the regional commissions and the regional committees to encourage and assist in the creation of geographical names authorities, particularly in African countries, and to strengthen and enhance the functionalities of the GeoNyms application for capturing and validating toponyms, so that geographical names authorities can be the sole source of validated and approved names reflecting national cultural, social and historical heritages. Further, the Committee commended its Regional Committee for the Americas and the Group of Experts on their partnership through the CARIGEO initiative, which sought to create national geographical names authorities and define standardisation procedures for the Caribbean Member States, so that outcomes could serve as good practice for other small island developing States.

¹ See [E/C.20/2020/34/Add.1](#)

III. Intersecting the work of the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts

4. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2016/27 on “Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management” marked five years of operation of the Committee of Experts. The resolution mandated the Committee to strengthen geospatial information management capacities in developing countries and to streamline its role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, among other development agenda items. Under this resolution, the Committee of Experts has developed the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF), IGIF and has identified the fourteen (14) global fundamental geospatial data themes, of which “Geographic Names” is recognised as a fundamental theme.

5. Under its agenda items² on “Strengthening Geospatial Information Management”, the Committee of Experts details its practical and strategic actions undertaken to implement resolution 2016/27 and strengthen geospatial information management in Member States. Notably, in its decision 10/101, the Committee acknowledged that the culmination of the broad programme of work of the Committee of Experts over the past ten years was the IGIF, not only as evidence of the achievements of the Committee to date, but as a means of enabling Member States to integrate and strengthen their national geospatial information arrangements according to their national circumstances. That, when coupled with a strong portfolio of outputs from the broader programme of the Committee, has provided a strong foundation for the work Committee. Further, during the coming intersessional period of the Group of Experts, the Committee of Experts will report on its progress pursuant to resolution 2016/27 back to ECOSOC. It is with this lens that this section highlights a few of the flagship work items the Committee is undertaking.

Responding to COVID-19

6. The onset of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has simultaneously impacted and underscored the importance of the Committee of Expert’s substantive programme, with the Committee and its functional groups rapidly adapting to new working arrangements imposed by COVID-19. In the second year of responding to COVID-19, Member States have taken unprecedented steps to transform themselves to use geospatial information and, in doing so, have demonstrated the importance of reliable and reusable data at differing levels of geographic disaggregation as key to balancing the various challenges and needs of public safety and communication during the pandemic.

7. In its paper³ “COVID-19: Ready to Respond”, the Committee of Experts summarised the response of the global geospatial information management community in the elaboration and communication of the geospatial response to the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, enshrining the critical need for, and the value of, geospatial information. This paper underscored the critical and urgent need for countries and the multilateral system to mobilise resources to ensure the availability and accessibility of geospatial information, not just for COVID-19 in both the short- and long-term, but for the Sustainable Development Goals as well; observing that the strong intersectional of integrated geospatial information needs for the 2030 Agenda and COVID-19, and other work areas of the Committee. The Committee observed that the IGIF has anchored the various national responses to COVID-19, and that a first step for many has been to develop dashboards to communicate and visualise the spread of COVID-19.

8. These dashboards inform all, from decision-makers and to the public and are empowered by geospatially integrated data. Here, Geographical Names have been, and will be, a key communication mechanism and interface on geographic location. Hopefully, as we work towards building back better, the geographies used by decision-makers to identify outbreaks, and then

² [E/C.20/2020/4/Add.1](#) and [E/C.20/2020/23/Add.1](#)

³ http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf

enforce restrictions, will become smaller and more localised. A key challenge to ensuring the appropriate use of smaller geographies will be to ensure that all can understand them in society. The integration of geospatial information and geographic names is a key fundamental step towards empowering such public health information and further underscores the need for cooperation with the global geospatial information management community.

Future Trends in Geospatial Information Management

9. At its tenth session, the Committee of Experts adopted the third edition⁴ of the report on “Future Trends in Geospatial Information Management (the 5- to 10-year vision)”, developed through broad global consultation under the guidance and leadership of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, through Ordnance Survey of Great Britain. As a valuable resource for highlighting the importance of geospatial information, which reflects a wide set of emerging and developing trends that could be harnessed by all Member States, the Future Trends report highlights how recording place names is a mechanism that can simultaneously reveal errors within authoritative data and strengthen the use of user-generated data in humanitarian scenarios.

Funding and Contributions to Support Capacity Building

10. The previous report⁵ to the Group of Experts in 2018 and the Committee’s reports on strengthening geospatial information management⁶ detail the full extent of funding and contributions, all as extra-budgetary resources, to support the activities of the Committee of Experts. Specifically, these included: the second China Trust Fund for a further five years, from 2018-2022, to continue to improve and strengthen national geospatial information management, systems and capacities in China and other developing countries; the 11th tranche of the Development Account, a capacity development programme of the United Nations Secretariat, from 2018-2021, aimed at enhancing the capacities of developing countries towards implementing the 2030 Agenda through the implementation of the IGIF; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-fund of the United Nations Trust Fund for Peace and Development, a limited (November 2018-November 2019) extra budgetary resource which enabled crucial capacity-development consultations and workshops in the development of the Implementation Guide of the IGIF. No further extra-budgetary resources have been realised during the intersessional period, while the UN Trust Fund for Peace and Development has now reached its conclusion.

UN-GGIM’s Strategic Future – The Integrated Geospatial Information Framework

11. At its tenth session, the Committee of Experts acknowledged that the culmination of the broad programme of work of the Committee of Experts over the past ten years was the IGIF, not only as evidence of the achievements of the Committee to date, but as a means of enabling Member States to integrate and strengthen their national geospatial information arrangements according to their national circumstances, and that, when coupled with a strong portfolio of outputs from the broader programme of the Committee, it provided a strong foundation for reporting back to the ECOSOC in 2021.

Sixth High-Level Forum on UN-GGIM

12. Due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, the Sixth High-Level Forum on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management successfully convened and streamed virtually⁷ to an audience on all five continents through a series of three virtual events on 26 May, 2 June and 9 June 2020. The three events

⁴ https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Future_Trends_Report_THIRD_EDITION_digital_accessible.pdf

⁵ GEGN.2/2019/47/CRP.47

⁶ E/C.20/2020/4/Add.1 and E/C.20/2020/23/Add.1

⁷ http://ggim.un.org/meetings/2020/Virtual_HLF

addressed the geospatial landscape, that included strategic overviews of the IGIF and the Future Trends report; the IGIF, with its nine strategic pathways for articulating and demonstrating national leadership in geospatial information, and with country-level action plans, the capacity to take positive steps; and the Future Trends report that provides expert views and strategic insight on the mid to long term-developments and emerging trend in geospatial information including the role of government.

IV. Collaborative Activities

13. This section of the report provides an overview of the activities pursued as part of the efforts to build a stronger relationship between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts. These collaborative activities include: (i) the meeting of the Bureaux at the Committee's ninth session and in other fora; (ii) The Committee of Experts participation at the first session of the Group of Experts; (iii) the Group of Experts participation in the ninth and tenth sessions of the Committee of Experts; and, (iv) support to the Committee of Experts' work on global fundamental geospatial data themes.

Meeting of the Bureaux and Other Fora

14. On 8 August 2019, both Bureaux convened a side meeting on the margins of the ninth session of the Committee of Experts. The meeting was attended by 20 participants from both Bureaux, the Committee of Experts' Secretariat and its Regional Committees of Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Further details are within the Group of Expert's report⁸ to the Committee at the tenth session.

15. The Chair of the Group of Experts updated⁹ the Expanded Bureau of the Committee of Experts at its virtual meeting on 11 March 2021. This update included detailing its future Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 – 2029. In response, the Expanded Bureau noted that the Strategic Plan is drafted with five strategies, among which the second, "Relationships, links and connections", underlines the Group of Expert's wish to strengthen the links between the two bodies and to deepen collaboration on concrete projects. In that sense, the Expanded Bureau of the Committee of Experts appreciated the invitation of the Chair of the Group of Experts to participate in this session, and to help define tangible projects to be conceived and achieved, matching with expectations of both bodies. Moreover, the Chair of the Group of Experts reiterated the willingness to practically implement decision 10/112 of the Committee of Experts in supporting the establishment of a liaison group between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts to act as a guiding mechanism to manage the flow of information between the two bodies, and to continue to identify areas of joint work. A key emanating outcome will be to convene a joint meeting of the Bureaux following the second session of the Group of Experts, but before the upcoming eleventh session of the Committee of Experts.

16. Further, during the intersessional period, the United Nations Statistics Division, which serves as the Secretariat for both bodies, shared decisions coming out of the sessions of the Committee of Experts and meetings of its Bureau and other relevant information such as meeting announcements and invitations with the Group of Experts.

Participation of the Committee of Experts at the first session of the Group of Experts

17. The report¹⁰ of the Committee of Experts at the first session of the Group of Experts was delivered by the Secretariat of the Committee of Experts.

⁸ [E/C.20/2020/34/Add.1](#)

⁹ http://ggim.un.org/meetings/Bureau_Meetings/11March2021/UNGEKN%20Information%20Brief%20March%202021.pdf

¹⁰ [GEGN.2/2019/47/CRP.47](#)

Participation of the Group of Experts at the ninth and tenth Sessions of the Committee of Experts

18. The Group of Experts presents reports to the Committee of Experts under the agenda item “Strengthening of collaboration with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names”. At the ninth session of the Committee of Experts in August 2018, the Group of Experts was represented by its Vice-Chair from the Republic of Korea¹¹. At the tenth session, the Group was represented by its Chair from France¹². The Committee of Experts welcomes the continued support of the Group of Experts in this regard.

Contributing to the Committee’s work on global fundamental geospatial data themes

19. At its ninth session, the Committee of Experts recognised the contribution of its Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes for their efforts to support the advancement of the 14 global fundamental geospatial data themes. This recognition was inclusive of the considerable contributions made by the Group of Expert’s two representatives from the United Kingdom and Germany, who prepared the description of the theme “Geographical Names”, one of the 14 themes adopted. Alongside the interactive presentation on the 14 themes¹³, the Working Group has developed a report¹⁴ that elaborates on the themes for their further promotion and awareness-raising.

V. Issues for Consideration

20. In its resolution 74/303¹⁵, the General Assembly encourages ECOSOC, as the parent body of both the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts, to create synergies and coherence among its subsidiary bodies, to address gaps, overlaps, and duplication in their respective agendas, both as they relate to the 2030 Agenda and as a whole. Therefore, at a minimum, it is hoped that both bodies will be able to allocate the human resources needed to explore and identify potential areas for collaboration and joint activities. Further, the Committee of Experts supports the efforts of the Group of Experts in the development of its Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 – 2029.

21. The following potential areas for collaboration are being brought to the attention of the Group of Expert for their consideration: (i) at the national level where national mapping agencies/geospatial information management agencies and geographical names authorities are separate organisations, both may consider forging links to share and exchange technical expertise, share geographical names data, and conduct joint data collection exercises among other cost-saving and efficiency initiatives; (ii) work jointly to encourage and communicate the benefits of geographical names standardisation and the importance of creating names authorities; (iii) pursue joint capacity building initiatives particularly for those countries in transition and on the cusp of implementing national geospatial information management systems; and (iv) the Group of Experts support the implementation and promotion of the data strategic pathway of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework - Implementation Guide.

¹¹ [E/C.20/2020/17/Add.1](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm)

¹² [E/C.20/2020/34/Add.1](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm)

¹³ <https://arcg.is/q9z8W>

¹⁴ http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/9th-Session/documents/Fundamental_Data_Publication.pdf

¹⁵ [A/RES/74/303](https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm)