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**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

Report of Iceland

Submitted by Iceland **

Summary:

The full report of Iceland comprises the following sections:

1. Background information on the standardization of geographical names in Iceland.
2. Overview of actively maintained toponymic datasets, toponym collection and standardization initiatives.
3. Administrative activity in the period March 2021 to March 2023 that has a bearing on geographical names.
4. Training and public awareness activities on geographical names.
5. New publications and relevant websites.
6. Current contact details of members representing Iceland.

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Report of Iceland

1. Background information on the standardization of geographical names in Iceland

1.1 Linguistic background

Iceland is historically a unilingual country. Icelandic, which is written in a Latin alphabet, is the national language and the only official language in Iceland according to the 2011 ‘Law on the position of the Icelandic Language and the Icelandic Sign Language’ (<https://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2011.061.html>), which also states that Icelandic Sign Language is officially recognized by the Icelandic government.

Only names in Icelandic are the object of official efforts to standardize and collect place-names. Dialectal differences in Iceland are insubstantial and do not affect the written form of place-names.

1.2 Current toponymic legislation

Current toponymic legislation is the 2015 Place-Name Act, designed to encompass a broad spectrum of place-name matters from issues of official standardization and regulation of geographical names to the status of place-names as cultural heritage. The 2015 Place-Name Act can be found here (<https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2015022.html>, in Icelandic).

The broad scope is set out in the first paragraph of the Act where the aims are stated as follows:

- to promote the protection of place-names and naming traditions in the country as part of Icelandic cultural heritage and to ensure that it is maintained for future generations;
- to ensure that new place-names conform to the rules of the Icelandic language;
- to ensure that new place-names are consistent with Icelandic topography and naming traditions;
- to co-ordinate administrative procedures in the registration of geographical names, so that the process of naming is open, transparent and effective.

1.3 Enforcement of place-name matters

The top-level authority in matters of place-name protection is the cabinet minister for culture and business affairs (Menningar- og viðskiptaráðuneytið). This minister appoints an official Place-name Committee (Icelandic: Örnefnanefnd) made up of five members. The head is appointed without nomination by the aforementioned minister. The other four members are nominated by i) the minister in charge of planning, ii) the minister for local government, iii) the Icelandic Language Council, and iv) the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (ÁMI). The 2015 law states that among the members of the committee there should be expertise on the Icelandic language, place names, and topography. The Place-Name Committee is responsible for overseeing the enforcement of the 2015 Place-Name Act on a national basis, according to the Place-Name Act and the Regulations about the Committee’s work (Reglugerð um störf örnefnanefndar, see <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=d926029d-a684-4f96-85a8-bbf15ac28da3>).

Members of the current committee were appointed in 2019 and their term will end in 2023. Information about the Place-Name Committee and annual reports are online at <https://www.arnastofnun.is/is/ornefnanefnd>. See further section 3.1.

As of 2015, local municipalities bear responsibility in the first instance for overseeing place-name matters such as processing requests for new habitative names and changes to existing ones, coming up with names for new natural phenomena (topographical names), and new municipality names in the event of the merger of two or more municipalities. The Place-name Committee has a consultative role though it may also take up matters on its own initiative; staff at the ÁMI provide advisory support to parties involved (e.g. planning officials working for local municipalities and individuals).

Further details, including the historical background to the 2015 laws, the laws themselves, and the Place-name Committee, can be found in the Full Report of Iceland submitted to UNGEGN for the 2019 session, in sections 2A, 2B and 2C (GEGN.2/2019/45/CRP.45/Rev.2).

2. Overview of actively maintained toponymic data-sets, toponym collection and standardization initiatives

2.1 *The Place-Name Archive at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (ÁMI; Icel.: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum)*. The archive is mainly made up of place-name registers for farms and holds such registers for almost all farms in Iceland, covering most of the (historically) inhabited part of the country. In most cases the registers are not mere lists of names, but a text with a broad topographic description of the land of the farm with emphasis on places that have names known to the informant. In each register the names are numbered in the order they appear in the text and then listed alphabetically at the end of the text to facilitate use. Maps also form an important part of the archive. The registers, as well as some other documents, are now available and searchable via the Nafnið.is/Nafnid.is website (<https://nafnið.is/> and <https://nafnid.is>). The web-map feature of Nafnið.is draws its data from the database of geo-referenced place-names maintained by the National Land Survey of Iceland (see 2.2 below). Occasionally, new registers, revised registers, annotated maps or aerial photographs are sent in by members of the public for safe-keeping in the ÁMI archive.

Around 14,000 place-name registers have been scanned and marked up for publication via the Nafnið.is website. These documents contain approximately 500,000 toponyms (many of which are micro-toponyms such as field-names) and were compiled by a total of around 7,400 place-name collectors and informants around the country, working over a period of a century or so.

Over the period 2022-2023, all draft and working materials pertaining to the registers, as well as other parts of the archive. Around 13,000 documents were examined, registered in the database and linked to farms or other places. In the new building, the archive will be kept in a secure environment that meets high archival preservation standards. The programme of cataloguing all materials in the archive will greatly benefit those who are interested in researching the history of place-name collection in Iceland, as well as individual parties with private and public interests. The opportunity to catalogue the previously uncatalogued parts of the collection came up in conjunction with the ÁMI's move into a new purpose-built building in the summer of 2023.

2.2 *Database of geo-referenced place-names at the National Land Survey of Iceland (NLSI, Icel.: Landmælingar Íslands)*. This is the official Place-Name Database referred to in current Icelandic legislation about place-names (on which see 1.2 above). It constitutes one of eight layers in a larger database on land information, named IS 50V, that is maintained by the NLSI.

At the end of 2021 the database contained around 150,000, of which approximately 13,000 were new additions. At the end of 2022 the database contained around 164,000 names, of which approximately 16,000 were new. The toponymic data-set is refreshed and published on a weekly basis so that the most up-to-date information is available on the NLSI's web-based maps and for free download at <https://gatt.lmi.is/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/AED93950-4043-4D42-B8F8-C118611F33C9>. See <https://www.lmi.is/is/landupplýsingar/ornefni/ornefni> for more information about NLSI's work with place-names.

The NLSI works closely with the ÁMI whose experts provide advice when doubt arises about e.g. the form of a name, its exact location, or about issues of standardization. In addition to this, a collaborative, crowd-sourcing project called 'Hvar er?' was launched by NLSI and ÁMI in autumn 2021 and ran to the end of 2022. A platform and app were developed that enabled people to register themselves in order to submit GIS co-ordinates of previously unlocated place-names in the archival records held by ÁMI and accessible via Nafnið.is. Courses were held around the country to help

people learn how to use the tool (see further 4.1 below). Around 100 individuals participated and co-ordinates for approximately 800-1,000 place-names were added or adjusted. See further <https://www.lmi.is/is/um-lmi/frettayfirlit/hvar-er> and <https://nafnid.is/hvarer>.

2.3 Icelandic Cadastral Office (*Húsnæðis- og mannvirkjastofnun/HMS*)

This was formerly part of Registers Iceland (Þjóðskrá Íslands) but from July 1st 2022 has been part of the Housing and Construction Authority (Húsnæðis- og mannvirkjastofnun). This office maintains a Register of Access Addresses (<https://fasteignaskra.is/gogn/grunnoggn-til-nidurhals/stadfangaskra/>) and publishes the Icelandic Cadastral Map (covers about 50% of registered properties <https://geo.fasteignaskra.is/landeignaskra/>). It participates in the Nordic Address Forum (<https://www.skra.is/nordic-address-forum/>) which is an informal collaboration between the authorities in the Nordic countries who have responsibility for determining and maintaining addresses and address data.

2.4 Local place-name collection initiatives

In parts of the country, educational institutes such as the University of Iceland's regional centres also have ongoing projects that involve place-name collection as part of their research programmes. At the University of Iceland's Research Institute in Hólmavík, Strandir (Rannsóknasetur Háskólasetur á Ströndum), folklorists are working with local communities on themes including place-names and place-naming traditions. Similarly, the Kirkjubæjarstofa institute in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Skaftafellssýsla, south-east Iceland, is working on adding to or revising existing place-name records. In the latter case, data is collected and sent to NLSI.

2.5 Association for Geospatial Information (*LÍSA – Samtök um landupplýsingar*)

LÍSA does not maintain a database of geographical names itself but it is an association that aims to strengthen co-operation between parties with geographic data. Many institutes that maintain active databases containing geographical names are members and the association holds meetings and conferences regularly (see further <https://landupplysingar.is/>).

3. Administrative activity in the period March 2021-March 2023 that has a bearing on geographical names

3.1 Place-Name Committee work

The Place-Name Committee held four meetings in 2021, and five meetings in 2022. As yet no meetings have been held in 2023.

In 2021, thirteen requests for recommendations and opinions on new names were submitted to the Committee and discussed by its members, including that of the new National Park in the West Fjords, and the name of the new lava-field and craters that were formed as a result of the Fagradalsfjall eruption.

In 2022, nine requests for recommendations and opinions on new names were submitted to the Committee and discussed by its members. These included a number cases where new names for merging municipal authorities required formal evaluation (see 3.2 below); one case where a name for a previously unnamed glacial tongue formed from Svínafellsjökull glacier in the east of Iceland was proposed; and one instance of an opinion being sought regarding a new name for a natural feature that emerged as a result of melting ice on the Vatnajökull glacier.

With regard to this latter issue, it is anticipated that as a result of the changing climate and the consequences of this for landscape change (whether this is new mountain-tops or other natural features emerging from under melting glacial ice, or avalanches and mudslides altering surface landforms), more examples will occur in the future.

A second noteworthy initiative in 2022 was the Committee's decision to intervene at its own discretion following clauses 2 and 3 of the and recommend against a municipal authority allowing a new habitative name which did not conform to Icelandic naming practices.

3.2 *Changes to local municipal names*

Local municipalities that merged in 2022

- Stykkishólmsbær and Helgafellssveit became Sveitarfélagið Stykkishólmur;
- Blönduósbær and Húnavatnshreppur became Húnabyggð;
- Akrahreppur and Sveitarfélagið Skagafjörður became Sveitarfélagið Skagafjörður;
- Langanesbyggð and Svalbarðshreppur became Langanesbyggð;
- Skútustaðahreppur and Þingeyjarsveit became Þingeyjarsveit.

4. Training and public-facing work on geographical names

4.1 *'Hvar er?'* training courses

Mini training courses around Iceland were held by NLSI in 2022 in conjunction with the 'Hvar er' crowdsourcing project (see 2.2 above). Information is online at <https://www.lmi.is/is/landupplysingar/ornefni/ornefnanamskeid>.

4.2 *Nafnfræðifélag Íslands – The Icelandic Onomastics Society*

A new committee was voted in to run the Icelandic Onomastics Society in 2022. Information about the committee and events organised by the Society can be found online here <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1556820254615678>. The Society also has an Instagram social media account <https://www.instagram.com/nafni25/>.

A well-attended conference was held in October 2022 in conjunction with the Árni Magnússon Institute. The programme included papers on the place-name archive held by the ÁMI, street-names in Reykjavík, place-names associated with the medieval Icelandic bishop Guðmundur góði, and place-names around Breiðafjörður in west Iceland. The full programme is here <https://arnastofnun.is/is/vidburdir/malthing-nafnfraedifelagsins>.

4.3 *TV-series about Icelandic place-names*

Discussion about Icelandic place-names is often found in the media and on social media sites. In 2022, an 8-part TV series was shown on the Icelandic National Broadcasting service (RÚV). It featured interviews with local people around Iceland and glimpses into the place-name archive at the Árni Magnússon Institute.

5. New publications and relevant websites

5.1 A bibliography of publications pertaining to Icelandic place-names is kept here <https://www.arnastofnun.is/is/ritaskra-um-islenska-nafnfrædi> (last updated in 2020).

5.2 Research articles published on Icelandic place-names over the period 2021-2023 include:

- Chris Callow, 2021. 'The Study of Icelandic Place-names'. In *Names, texts and landscapes in the Middle Ages: A Memorial Volume for Duncan Probert*, edited by Steven Bassett and Alison J. Spedding. Donington: Shaun Tyas.
- Emily Lethbridge, 2021. 'Nafnið.is'. *Orð og tunga* 23: 167-68. <https://ordogtunga.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/259>
- Ari Páll Kristinsson. 2021. 'Örnefni erlendis og á heimaslóð'. *Katrín Axelsdóttir, Veturliði Óskarsson og Þorsteinn Indriðason (ritstj.)*, Möggubrár heklaðar Margréti Jónsdóttur sjötugri 21. mars 2021, 19–23. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

- Svavar Sigmundsson, 2022. ‘Stóparnir í Dufansdal’. *Orð og tunga* 24: 91-95. <https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/267/149>

6. Current contact details of members representing Iceland (starred) and other relevant institutes that

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*The National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands), Stillholti 16–18, 300 Akranes. (<https://www.lmi.is/>) [Bjarney Guðbjörnsdóttir]

Icelandic Cadastral Office, Housing and Construction Authority (Húsnæðis- og mannvirkjastofnun), Borgartúni 21, 105 Reykjavík. (<https://hms.is/>)

Icelandic Coast Guard – Hydrographic Department (Landhelgisgæsla Íslands – Sjósmælingar), Skógarhlíð 14, 105 Reykjavík. (www.lhg.is)