

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
2025 Session
28 April – 2 May 2025
Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda
**Culture, heritage and language recognition: geographical
names as culture, heritage and identity**

Background document
Available in English

Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage
Global Survey on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Prepared by UNGEGN Secretariat, WGGNCH Convenors & Members

UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

UNGEGN Member States are invited to participate in a data-collecting project organised by the Working Group for Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.

The survey should be completed by representatives from the NNA and NMA in your country. If both entities operate within the same organization, we encourage submitting a single response that represents both. However, if they belong to separate organizations, at least two responses should be submitted accordingly. In cases where an NNA and/or NMA do not exist, representatives from the organization responsible for geographical naming and/or mapping activities may complete the questionnaire.

Background

UNGEGN has consistently highlighted the technical, economic, social, and cultural benefits of standardizing geographical names. It recognizes these names as key elements of cultural heritage, reflecting historical, folkloric, traditional, and ideological continuity and change within societies. Aligned with UNESCO's definition of cultural heritage, UNGEGN has initiated discussions on preserving and managing the cultural aspects of geographical names. This ongoing focus led to resolutions by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) in 2002, 2007, and ultimately in 2012, when a resolution was adopted to establish criteria for selecting geographical names as cultural heritage.

In the same year, a Working Group was re-structured within the framework of UNGEGN to address the topic of cultural heritage. After a period of inactivity (with the exception of the Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names), the work of this group has now been resumed. The revitalized Working Group for Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage is currently reviewing action items of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021–2029. The Group has created the present **Global Survey on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage** to help determine Member States' particular interests regarding this topic, and links to the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021–2029.

Data collected will be used to help the revitalized Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage in developing future actions.

The survey will be open online until Friday 24th May 2025. Results will be presented at an open, online webinar later in 2025. Any questions should be sent to the UNGEGN Secretariat (email geoinfo_unsd@un.org). **The online link is here:** <https://forms.office.com/r/uGxre4Ubhu>.

We thank you in advance for your participation!

Global Survey on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Answers to all or any questions are welcome. Examples to illustrate answers are especially welcome. If you feel unable to answer one question, just move on to the next one.

Please complete the survey as soon as possible. It will be open until Friday 24th May 2025. Any questions should be sent to the UNGEGN Secretariat (email geoinfo_unsd@un.org).

Reference numbers refer to Action Items within Strategy 2 and Strategy 4 of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021–2029 (for further details, see

https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/UNGEKN_Strategic_Plan_Programme/documents/UNGEKN_Strategic_Plan_Programme_V5.2.pdf).

SECTION 1 – Information about participants

1. Name*
2. Member State*
3. Affiliation
4. Email and/or contact details*

SECTION 2: Knowledge of geographical names as cultural heritage, laws, policies and activities

5. Please describe your understanding of Cultural Heritage, or note how your country's National Names Authority understands or defines Cultural Heritage.
6. Are there laws or guidelines in your country to protect geographical names as cultural heritage? If yes, please provide detail or examples.
7. Please describe any activities that your country is currently implementing to acknowledge or safeguard geographical names as cultural heritage (e.g. developing policy, developing online resources, sharing information via other channels about geographical names as cultural heritage).

8. How important would you say these activities are from the point of view of your country's National Names Authority?

Very

Somewhat

Not important

SECTION 3: Connections to UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategies 2 and 4

Please describe relevant action or the involvement of your country with each of the following items noted in the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021–2029, Strategies 2 and 4. If there is no involvement, put 'not relevant' and move on:

9. Links to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Action Items 4-i-1 "Liaise with UNPFII and its members to better appreciate geographical names as part of indigenous cultural heritage and language retention", and **2-i-4b** "Further explore links with UNESCO to: b. Cooperate in recognition of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), 2022–2032"

10. The International Decade of Indigenous languages (IDIL)

Action Items 4-i-1 "Liaise with UNPFII and its members to better appreciate geographical names as part of indigenous cultural heritage and language retention", and **2-i-4b** "Further explore links with UNESCO to: b. Cooperate in recognition of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), 2022-2032"

11. Crowd sourcing (e.g. urban names / SDG 11 Sustainable cities)

Action Item 4-i-3 "Investigate the need for cooperation to advise on and share experiences on methods for crowd sourcing relating to urban naming and street naming processes, and the relationship with relevant SDGs"

12. Experience of co-operation with service providers (e.g. emergency services, tourism, community outreach programmes)

Action Item 4-i-4 "Share experience on cooperation with emergency services, tourism operators, brand consultants and other providers of services useful to society"

13. Recognition of geographical names as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO (**Action**

Items 4-ii-8 "Investigate recognition of geographical names by UNESCO as part of intangible cultural heritage", and **2-i-4a** "Further explore links with UNESCO to: a. Find a path to recognition of geographical names as a part of intangible cultural heritage of Member States")

14. Co-operation with academia (e.g. Members of National Naming Authorities, co-operation regarding geographical names research, advice for policy development, school/university curricula, etc.)

Action Item 4-ii-9 "Cooperate with academia, so that geographical name datasets collected are geo-referenced and linked to standardized datasets"

15. Recording geographical names from unwritten languages

Action Item 4-iv-12 “Investigate principles and methodology for recording and writing geographical names from unwritten languages”

SECTION 4: Challenges and collaboration

16. What challenges does your country face when working with geographical names as cultural heritage? (e.g. lack of governmental support, financial constraints, untrained staff, etc.)

17. Are there any particular aspects of work with geographical names as cultural heritage that you would like to see discussed, either formally or informally, by UNGEGN?

18. What aspect(s) of your country's work on geographical names as cultural heritage could you share with other countries to help improve their efforts?

Action Items 4-ii-5 “Share Member States’ treatment of geographical names in indigenous, minority and regional language groups (policies and principles, field collection methodology, naming of both cultural and physical features, etc”, **4-ii-6** “Share effective practices and applications on culturally-oriented resolutions, such as commemorative naming and commercialization of naming”, and **4-ii-7** “Encourage presentations and discussions relevant to current key cultural aspects of naming and renaming, and to naming in particular environments”