

10 March 2025

English

---

**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names  
2025 session**

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda \*

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

**Report of Estonia**

Submitted by Estonia\*\*

---

\* \* GEGN.2/2025/1

\*\* Prepared by Margit Mitt (Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, Estonia), Mall Leht (Land and Spatial Development Board, Estonia), Peeter Päll, Tiina Laansalu (Institute of the Estonian Language, Estonia)

The report covers activities in the field of the official standardization of geographical names from 2023 till 2025.

## NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

The **Place Names Act** continues to be the legal basis of geographical names standardization in Estonia. In 2023, changes were made in the Place Names Act regarding commemorative names. Where a personal name has been established as a commemorative name, or where it is a place name clearly incompatible with the history and culture of Estonia, including where the place name is associated with persons, symbols or events opposed to the establishment of the Republic of Estonia, the preservation of the constitutional order or the restoration of Estonian independence, the minister in charge of the policy sector proposes to a names authority that the place name be changed and that a place name be established in accordance with the law. To identify a place name that is in contradiction with the requirements of the law, the minister requests the opinion of the Place Names Board on the incompatibility of the name.

The **Place Names Board** (*kohanimenõukogu*) is Estonia's main names authority. It is a consultative body that is under the responsibility of the Minister of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, working in the framework of the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture. Between 2023 and 2025, fifteen (15) Board meetings were held.

There is a gradual process of new **populated places** being formed or some places being renamed. The Minister of Regional Affairs and Agriculture has the right to approve names of populated places based on the applications of local governments and the opinion of the Place Names Board. Between 2023 and 2025, one new village has been established (Lustimõisa küla).

The Place Names Board has the authority to confirm **lists of geographical names** provided no other authorities have done so. Mainly, this provision concerns names of natural features. Between 2023 and 2025, the Board did not confirm any large lists of geographical names but worked with small proposals from active citizens to add some names of different natural features to the place names register.

During 2023–2025, the Board has handled requests to rename some features, like streets, villages, and settlements, and given its opinion.

In 2023, the Minister of Regional Affairs renamed five streets (in Narva municipality) that were incompatible with the history and culture of Estonia and therefore had to be renamed.

Since 2003, the Board has continued its annual public events for a wider audience, **place names days**, that deal with issues of place names standardization. These are meant primarily for local officials but are open to all interested persons. The place name days take place in different locations: in 2024, it was held in Tartu, and in April 2025, it will be held in Rakvere. Papers delivered at seminars deal with the implementation of the Place Names Act, principles of names standardization, information on the Place Names Register, and the place names of the local region.

Important for the understanding of the principles of geographical names standardization is training and providing assistance to names authorities. The Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board is continuously updating an online **Handbook for the Management of Address Data and Place Names**. This includes 290 pages of instructions, one-third of which directly concern geographical names. As a body responsible for the maintenance of the National Place Names Register, the Land and Spatial Development Board is checking the validity and conformance to the Law of all names entered into the register. A continuous process that the Land and Spatial Development Board is supervising is the check on the validity of cadastral names.

All the documents concerning the activities of the Place Names Board have been published on the Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture website ([agri.ee/en/administration-place-names](https://agri.ee/en/administration-place-names)).

### *Minority names*

The Place Names Act supports the use of minority place names, in some cases, two parallel names are officially established. For example, there are parallel Estonian and Swedish names in the municipality of Noarootsi (since 2017 part of Lääne-Nigula) and, since 2011, on the island of Naissaar.

In southeastern Estonia, the names of populated places in several municipalities of the counties of Võrumaa and Põlvamaa have been standardized in their local form, i.e., in the Võru variety. This has been done with the aid of

the Võru Institute. The Basic Map of Estonia (printed version) uses almost exclusively local name forms for natural features. Differences with the formerly used name variants are mainly phonetic. Local forms are established also for some other areas, e.g., Kihnu island, Mulgi, and Tartu regions.

### *Cartographic programmes and training courses*

**The Estonian Topographic Database (ETD)** is the central database to produce and provide topographic data covering the whole territory of Estonia. The Estonian National Topographic Database was established in 2007. The most important products are maps and services. Data is continuously being updated. One of the main objectives of ETD is to provide state and local government databases with topographic spatial data for objects managed in these respective databases. So far, ETD has successfully met the needs of national databases, such as the Road Register, Address Data System, Nature Information System, National Place Names Register, Land Cadastre, etc. Topographic data has been available in Estonia as open data to meet society's demand for high-quality spatial data since 1 July 2018.

### **Navigational charts**

The Estonian Transport Administration ([transpordiamet.ee/en](http://transpordiamet.ee/en)) manages several digital maritime information systems. Estonian Transport Administration's Web application Nutimeri displays the Estonian Transport Administration's official electronic navigational charts above the background of orthophoto or base map from the Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board. Data layers from the Hydrographic Information System and/or spatial data objects like aids to navigation, fairways, and harbours can be added to the chart layers. The application works on all platforms, allowing GPS positioning, making queries of data objects, and using measuring and drawing tools.

### *Gazetteers and databases*

The **National Place Names Register** ([kohanimeregister.ee](http://kohanimeregister.ee)) has been maintained by the Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board (up to 2025 Estonian Land Board) since July 2008. Since December 2020, the Land and Spatial Development Board has been the controller of the register. The Place Names Register map ([xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik](http://xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik)) is integrated with the Land and Spatial Development Board's other spatial data, especially the Address Data System. The Place Names Register gives street names (thoroughfare names) and address area names data to the Address Data System. The register has the status of the national supporting register. At the beginning of 2025, there were 364,000 place names in the Place Names Register, including traffic features (thoroughfare names for streets, squares, etc.) – 18,200; land roads – 8,400; minor address units (address area names) – 600; lakes – 4,600; rivers, etc. – 3,200; islands – 2,530. Most of the registered entries are cadastral parcels (289,000), and the rest of the entries are land roads, bus stops, other objects connected with nature and land (landscape objects, waterbodies, etc.), and so on. The Place Names Register gets its data from the Estonian Topographic Database (ETD), the Environmental Portal, the Road Register, the National Public Transport and State Port Register, and the printed version of the Basic Map of Estonia (1 : 20,000). The spatial extension of the named features is constantly under review. Data is published online on geoportal maps ([xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik](http://xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik)).

The National Place Names Register is available at [kohanimeregister.ee](http://kohanimeregister.ee) in Estonian and English. In 2020, the public map application of the National Place Names Register was updated, it is available at [xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik](http://xgis.maaamet.ee/xgis2/page/app/knravalik). In 2020, the business analysis of the new Place Name Register was also completed.

The plan is to merge three registers: Address Data System, Place Names Register, and Points of Interest (POI). At the moment, Points of Interest are mainly collected by the Geoinformatics Department of the Land and Spatial Development Board from different state registers. The current Place Names Register is very outdated. The aim is also to stop using Oracle as a platform for ADS and to give legal status to the collecting of POIs. In April 2025, a new Address and Place Name System and a new Place Name Register will be implemented.

With the completion of higher resolution laser scanning in the years 2017-2020, the Land and Spatial Development Board is focusing more on providing true 3D data. A 3D web map application prototype was completed in 2022. However, 2D solutions will also be used. The new system of address data and place names (merged three registers) will use and publish both 2D and 3D data.

A database of standardized place names, including names from Estonia and abroad, **KNAB** (appr. 161,500 features with more than 518,000 names at present, [eki.ee/knab/knab.htm](http://eki.ee/knab/knab.htm)) is being developed at the Institute of the Estonian

Language. The Institute also has the largest collection of Estonian place names, collected in field work. The collections of geographical names held at the Institute of the Estonian Language were completely scanned by 2013 ([eki.ee/kohanimed](http://eki.ee/kohanimed)), the headword names have all been manually entered into the database so that the 540,615 cards can be queried online.

The **Dictionary of Estonian Place Names** („Eesti kohanimeraamat“) was published in 2016. The web version of the dictionary ([eki.ee/dict/knr](http://eki.ee/dict/knr)) was first published in February 2018, but its content is constantly updated to include newly created populated places.

#### EXONYMS

The Estonian Language Committee at the Mother Tongue Society, jointly with various institutions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Geography Institute at the University of Tartu, BNS News Agency), gives recommendations on the spelling of foreign geographical names. The list of names of countries of the world ([eki.ee/teatmik/maailma-maade-nimed](http://eki.ee/teatmik/maailma-maade-nimed)) is regularly updated.

In 2024, the Estonian Language Committee decided to adopt the Belarusian national romanization system for use in Estonia and changed the system for the romanization of Macedonian Cyrillic.

#### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Representatives of Estonia have actively participated in all meetings of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN. In October 2024, the meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN took place in Vilnius. Experts are also involved in some of the working groups of UNGEGN.