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English

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

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda *

**Reports of the Bureau and the Secretariat: Monitoring and
evaluation of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical
Names strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2029**

**Implementation of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names strategic plan and programme of
work 2021-2029 during the period of 2023-2025**

Submitted by the UNGEGN Bureau**

Summary

The report provides an overview of the progress and challenges in implementing the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2029, specifically during its second quarter of 2023-2025. It highlights both the progress and the areas needing attention in the ongoing implementation of the UNGEGN strategic plan.

The UNGEGN Bureau has been actively monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the strategic plan through online meetings and email communication. They emphasize the need for further involvement from the Member States, Working Groups, Divisions, and the Bureau.

Success has been noted in technical areas like geographical names data modelling and transfer standards, and enhancing the World Geographical Names Database with unique identifiers for cities. Efforts to strengthen relationships with other bodies such as ECOSOC, UN-GGIM, UNESCO, and UN Maps have shown progress. For routine items, progress has been made in publishing the UNGEGN Bulletin, maintaining a database of resolutions and recommendations, and reorganizing UNGEGN resources, including publications.

Activating items that have not progressed at a desired pace, particularly those related to culture, heritage, and language recognition, remains challenging. An incubator group is expected to manage these areas by revitalizing the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage. Promoting geographical name standardization in African countries requires experts dedicated to these tasks.

A spreadsheet attached to the report details the status of all 51 action items under the five strategies, highlighting proposed amendments concerning actors/responsibility, outputs, and timeframes for some items. The agenda for the 2025 session has been restructured to align with the five strategies of the strategic plan.

* GEGN.2/2025/1

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Implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 during the period of 2023-2025¹

Background

During its 2021 session, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) adopted [Recommendation 1](#), addressing the adoption of the [UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029](#) (SP&PoW). This recommendation was subsequently approved by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as [decision 2021/69](#). The decision includes provisions for the periodic evaluation of its implementation, as well as updates and amendment as deemed necessary. In line with this decision, the 2023 session acknowledged the report on the implementation of the SP&PoW for the period of 2021-2023 ([GEGN.2/2023/22](#)) and recognized the progress achieved. Furthermore, the session reaffirmed that the SP&PoW would continue to serve as a guiding framework for the Group of Experts and for the standardization of geographical names among Member States ([Decision 3/2023/5](#)).

This report provides a summary of the implementation during the second quarter of the planning period, 2023-2025, offering a preliminary assessment of the progress made and identifying future tasks to be prioritized in the remaining period.

Organization

The organizational structure for monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the SP&PoW has largely remained unchanged since the 2023 session. Coordinators of each strategy, along with the Bureau, have maintained consistent oversight and coordination of implementation progress through online meetings and email correspondence. In the absence of a coordinator for Strategy 4 – Culture, heritage and language recognition, a dedicated group has been formed to support implementation of its action items. This group consists of four members from the Expanded Bureau and volunteer experts from Argentina, Iceland, Mozambique and Zambia.

Summary of Progress

During the second biennium or quarter of the planning period, the following items are highlighted for the attention of the Group of Experts as areas of notable progress, with the corresponding action item numbers indicated in parenthesis:

Strategy 1. Technical expertise

- The technical document titled "[On geographical names data modelling and transfer related standards, manuals, or guidelines](#)" submitted to the 2023 session by the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management, has been made available on the Publications page of the UNGEGN website. This document is anticipated to offer valuable insights for the development of standards, manuals, or guidelines pertaining to geographical names data modelling and transfer (1-i-2, 1-iii-8, 3-ii-2).
- As a contribution to the design of the World Geographical Names Database, a concept for unique identifiers for cities has been developed. This concept is scheduled for adoption and endorsement through a dedicated decision at the 2025 session. Further details are provided in document GEGN.2/2025/21/CRP.21 (1-i-5).

¹ This working paper pertains to Recommendation 1 of the 1st session of UNGEGN (Development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work), Recommendation 1 of the 2nd session of UNGEGN (Adoption of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029), UNCSGN resolutions V/4 (Work performed by the UNGEGN and its future activities), and X/10 (Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names).

- UNGEGN representatives attended the UNESCO Language Technologies for All Conference in February 2025, which looked at scientific and technological solutions, including AI, to facilitate digitisation of under-resourced languages. UNGEGN will consider how such technologies can be harnessed for romanization and geographical names data management more broadly. (i-iii-10)

Strategy 2. Relationships, links and connections

- UNGEGN has contributed to requirements of higher bodies of the United Nations, e.g. participation in the ECOSOC Coordination Segment in January 2024 and February 2025, placing an infographic highlighting UNGEGN's objectives and work on the ECOSOC website for 2024 and 2025, and submitting a position paper to the ECOSOC High Level Political Forum. The 2025 session theme was decided in alignment with the ECOSOC's theme for 2025. Further details are provided in documents GEGN.2/2025/4/CRP.4 and GEGN.2/2025/5/CRP.5 (2-i-1).
- UNGEGN Chair had meetings with UNESCO's staff on the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) in October 2024 and discussed possible collaboration between UNGEGN and IDIL, notably linked with the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Ideas were also shared to prepare a programme to safeguard geographical names in non-written languages threatened by climate change. A special presentation by an IDIL representative is planned at the 2025 session. Further details are provided in documents GEGN.2/2025/4/CRP.4 and GEGN.2/2025/5/CRP.5 (2-i-4, 2-iii-8).
- UNGEGN's Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names contributed in 2025 towards the global survey conducted by IDIL for its Global Action Plan (2-i-4).
- UNGEGN has continued close collaboration with the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), e.g. participating and presenting in its 13th (2023) and 14th (2024) sessions and side events. Collaboration of geospatial and geographical names authorities at the Member State level has been sought through publishing a Bulletin issue (No. 67, June 2024) and developing a compendium of good practices with coordination of the Indonesian and United States experts. Further details are provided in document GEGN.2/2025/143/CRP.143 (1-i-3, 2-i-2).
- The liaison officer and a Bureau member of UNGEGN attended the 2023 and 2024 meetings of SCAGI (Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information) and were informed of operational activities and products of the group such as the Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica and the Antarctic Digital Database. (2-ii-6).
- UNGEGN representatives participated in the UN Maps Conference in Valencia, Spain, May 2023 and the UN Statistical Commission virtual side event on SDG localization in February 2025 to promote UNGEGN's tasks to a wider UN community. Further details are provided in documents GEGN.2/2025/4/CRP.4 and GEGN.2/2025/5/CRP.5 (5-i-1).

Strategy 3. Effective work programmes

- After a series of reviews, the UNGEGN publications page has been reorganized to include five documents: *Toponymy Training Manual* (2017), *On geographical names data modelling and transfer related standards, manuals, or guidelines* (CRP.99 of the 2023 session. see 1-i-2), *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* (2002 and 2007 Addendum), *Geographical names as vital keys for accessing information in our*

globalized and digital world, and *UNGEGN Brochure*. Three documents moved to the newly created publication archive page, including *Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names* (2006), *Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names* (2007), and *Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names* (1987, 1984). *The Media Kit* has been updated. Materials on romanization systems were reviewed and added at the UNGEGN website (3-ii-2, 1-i-2).

- An analysis was conducted on the working papers submitted to the 2023 session that referred to resolutions and recommendations. The result will be reported in document GEGN.2/2025/36/CRP.36 (3-ii-5).
- The resolutions and recommendations database has been updated and restructured with the addition of ECOSOC numbers (3-ii-6).
- The changes of working groups and coordinators decided at the 2023 session have been activated, including updates to the homepage information and to the SP&PoW. An incubator group has been established to discuss how to revitalize the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage. The progress of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, including the development of Terms of Reference and a Work Plan 2025 – 2027 is reported in document GEGN.2/2025/31/CRP.31. Further, a survey is being finalized aiming to assess Member States' engagement in geographical names as cultural heritage.
- Three meetings of the Bureau and Division Chairs were held in April 2024, Nov 2024 and March 2025 to share Divisions' roles and activities and suggest responsibilities of Division Chairs. Further details are provided in document GEGN.2/2025/158/CRP/158 (3-iii-7, action items of Strategy 4).
- Discussion on how to efficiently deliver national reports was made. National dialogue sessions will be thematically organized and scheduled on each day of the 2025 session (3-iii-8).

Strategy 4. Culture, heritage and language recognition

- Member States shared their experiences of culture, heritage and language recognition in the standardization of geographical names; 17 Member States (Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Iceland, Jordan, Latvia, Malaysia, Mozambique, New Zealand, Oman, Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa) on the role of geographical names in preserving cultural heritage through UNGEGN Bulletin 68, and New Zealand on cooperation with emergency services. This practice was extended to a Division (Romano-Hellenic Division hosting a symposium) and an academic group (International Council of Onomastics, Science holding a conference (4-i-2, 4-i-4, 4-ii-5, 4-ii-7)
- The Working Group on Exonyms held an in-person meeting in Prague, May 2024 and two virtual meetings in Oct 2024 and Jan 2025, and reached an agreement on a draft decision to reconcile exonyms and geographical names as cultural heritage. Details will be reported in GEGN.2/2025/71/CRP.71 (4-iii-10).

Strategy 5. Promotion and capacity building

- Website contents have been updated, including resolutions, publications, working groups, coordinators, etc. (5-ii-3).
- Issues of the UNGEGN Bulletin were published in Aug. 2023 (No.65), Dec. 2023 (No.66),

June 2024 (No. 67) and Dec. 2024 (No.68), with special features in *Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and for sustainable development and pandemic recovery* (No.65), *Geographical names supporting the international decade of indigenous languages* (No.66), *Good practices emerging from relations between national mapping/geospatial data management agencies and geographical names authorities* (No.67), and *The role of geographical names in preserving cultural heritage* (No.68) (5-ii-4).

Appendix 1 (attached as a background document to this report GEGN.2/2025/161/CRP.161/Add.1) details the status of all 51 action items under the five strategies.

Evaluation and Challenges

Since the establishment and implementation of the SP&PoW, all activities of UNGEGN have been conducted in alignment with this framework. The 51 action items have served as a guide to achieving the foundational objectives of UNGEGN. The agenda for the 2025 session has been restructured to align with the five strategies of the SP&PoW.

Certain action items within the SP&PoW require continuous attention and progress, presenting challenges in recording and evaluating clear outcomes². These items typically necessitate the development of more concrete implementation methods and evaluation metrics, requiring focused attention from UNGEGN to ensure their fulfillment to achieve the action items.

Some action items have not demonstrated significant progress during the first half of the planning period. The underlying causes can be attributed to:

- (a) a lack of resources for implementation, including human resources, financial support, and organizational governance;
- (b) weakened awareness and support from Member State governments; and
- (c) low prioritization due to the perceived feasibility, effectiveness, and specificity of the action items themselves.

These challenges could be a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which greatly influenced the management of Member States' policy priorities, budgets and human resources. Therefore, these issues require attention from UNGEGN on how to address them and effectively make progress.

Two prominent challenges can be identified for the future implementation of the SP&PoW. The first is establishing a framework to support the standardization of geographical names in African countries. Although notable achievements were made through the contributions of the Task Team for Africa, organized for this purpose, their activities have currently stalled (1-i-1, 2-i-3, 5-i-1). It is imperative to appoint new leadership and rebuild the support framework around them.

The second challenge involves re-establishing the framework for implementing the action items of Strategy 4, which focuses on the cultural, heritage, and linguistic aspects of geographical names. To address this, the formation of an incubator group comprising the Bureau and volunteer experts is a positive development. This group aims to revitalize the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and support the activities of focus groups established on thematic issues.

Recommendation 1(e) from the 2021 session emphasized the involvement of all components of

² For example, the following items could be considered as belonging to this case: 1-i-4 (Promote, agree upon, and disseminate romanization systems), 2-iii-7 (Encourage collaboration with academia), 3-i-1 (Encourage Member States to participate in UNGEGN sessions and activities and secure funds for this purpose), 4-ii-6 (Share effective practices and applications on culturally-oriented resolutions), etc.

UNGEKN in the implementation of the SP&PoW. It is anticipated that reports from Member States, Divisions, Working Groups and Coordinators on their activities regarding the SP&PoW will be shared in future sessions. During the 2023 session, eight Member States (Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa) and six Divisions (Africa Central, Arabic, Canada/USA, Latin America, Norden, Portuguese-speaking) reported on their implementation of actions in the SP&PoW (see Appendix 2 provided as a background document this this present report in GEGN.2/2025/161/CRP.161/Add.2) .

As the execution of the current SP&PoW surpasses its midpoint, it is advisable to begin considerations for developing Strategic Plan 2.0 for discussion at the 2027 session of UNGEKN. This will require an evaluation of each action item in the current plan to determine its continuity and, if necessary, the scope of any modifications and additions to address changes over eight years.

Amendments proposed

No amendments to the action items have been proposed following the 2023 session. However, revisions to the Actors/Responsibility and Output and Time Frame entries of the Programme of Work tables are deemed necessary.

The details of these revisions are indicated in red font in the attached worksheet in Appendix 1 and proposed for amendment.

Points for discussion:

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Acknowledge the work done by the Bureau, Working Groups, Coordinators and Divisions of UNGEKN and Member States in implementing the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 during the period of 2023-2025;
- (b) Accept the amendments proposed by the Bureau as detailed in the appendix and support appropriate measures to revitalize necessary frameworks;
- (c) Provide feedback on the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work;
- (d) Contribute to the ongoing implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work, including Member States' reporting on their own action items; and
- (e) Begin analyzing the current SP&PoW to inform the development of SP&PoW 2.0 for discussion at the 2027 session.