



## Economic and Social Council

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

New York, 28 April–2 May 2025

Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Effective work programmes: social and economic benefits  
of supporting sustainable development**

### **Advancing geographical names standardization for sustainable development in Saudi Arabia**

#### **Summary\*\***

Geographical names are more than mere labels. They embody cultural identity, historical significance and social cohesion. Standardizing such names is essential for fostering sustainable development and promoting inclusivity, accessibility and evidence-based planning. Saudi Arabia, guided by the principles of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, has implemented initiatives to align its geographical names with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The approach of Saudi Arabia prioritizes addressing evolving perceptions of place names. While many place names hold historical value, some are now seen by young people as being culturally misaligned or inappropriate. To ensure inclusivity, the National Committee on Geographical Names of Saudi Arabia employs participatory frameworks involving communities, linguistic experts and historians to refine place names or rename places. This approach balances modern values with the preservation of the country's historical roots, thereby fostering unity and cultural pride.

Standardized geographical names are also integrated into the tourism branding strategy of Saudi Arabia, ensuring that place names are culturally authentic and globally accessible. The romanized transliteration of Mada'in Saleh, for instance, reflects linguistic identity while enhancing international recognition. This approach supports sustainable tourism, thereby boosting local economies, preserving cultural sites and promoting global exchange in line with Sustainable Development Goals 8 (on decent work and economic growth) and 11 (on sustainable cities and communities).

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\* [GEGN.2/2025/1](#).

\*\* The full report was prepared by Abdullah AlThunaiyan (Saudi Arabia), General Authority for Statistics and member of the National Committee on Geographical Names. The report will be available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th\\_session\\_2025/](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/), in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/46/CRP.46



Romanization is a cornerstone of the efforts of Saudi Arabia with regard to the standardization of geographical names. The General Authority for Statistics maintains a dynamic spatial names database, ensuring that Arabic names are accurately represented in Latin script for use in digital platforms, navigation systems and global maps. This ensures phonetic integrity, facilitates global accessibility and supports accurate dissemination of official statistics. Moreover, standardized spatial data strengthen evidence-based decision-making for infrastructure planning, resource allocation and disaster management.

These initiatives align with Sustainable Development Goals 11 (on sustainable cities and communities) and 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions) and leverage geographical names standardization to enhance cultural inclusion, social cohesion and environmental stewardship. The approach of Saudi Arabia to the standardization of geographical names demonstrates how nations can tie together cultural heritage and modernization, making geographical names a tool for sustainable development in a globalized world.

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