

4. LEGISLATION ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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There are legal acts that are concerned with at least partly standardization and official approval of geographical names in many countries. These mostly identify the competence of various agencies in dealing with names. But in a few of the countries geographical names have merited also special legislation. We used examples Estonia and Norway.

The Place Names Act of **Estonia** was adopted in 1996. This legal act determines both the competence of various agencies in establishing place names and requirements for place names in order to be approved officially. The main requirements include:

- The language of place names (as a rule, these are in Estonian but minority names are also legal).
- The spelling of place names (this must comply with the rules of orthography but may reflect the local sound structure).
- Having only one name per (one) feature but allowing two official names in order to preserve minority language place names.
- Harmonization of the spellings of names.
- Publicity of naming procedures.
- Choice of new official place names (locally most widely recognized and widespread, also most significant in terms of history and cultural history shall be preferred).
- Allowing for change of geographical names only under exceptional circumstances.
- Avoidance of duplicate names in certain contexts.

Toponymic guidelines for Estonia, 1998, see: [UNEGN Working Group on Toponymic Guidelines](#)

For more information on the Norwegian example click here , and click [here](#) (or download [pdf](#)) for the Norwegian Place Name Act of 1990.



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