

28 June 2017

Original: English

**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity
(including indigenous, minority and regional language names)**

National minority languages and regional languages in Germany

Submitted by Germany **

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Jörn Sievers, Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen (StAGN)

Summary:

The official language in all parts of the Federal Republic of Germany is German in its standard form. Moreover, the languages of four national minorities residing in Germany - the Danes, the Frisians, the Sorbs, and the German Sinti and Roma – are officially recognized as minority languages.

Low German has the status of a regional language preserving protection in the sense of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

National minority and regional languages in Germany

The official language in all parts of the Federal Republic of Germany is German in its standard form. Moreover, the languages of four national minorities residing in Germany - the Danes, the Frisians, the Sorbs, and the German Sinti and Roma – are officially recognized as minority languages. *These groups receive special protection and specific funding from the federal and state governments. The Federal Government regards as national minorities those population groups who meet the following criteria:*

- *their members are German nationals;*
- *they differ from the majority population in having their own language, culture and history and thus their own distinct identity;*
- *they wish to maintain this identity;*
- *they have traditionally been resident in Germany (usually for centuries);*
- *they live in Germany within traditional settlement areas.*

For historical reasons, the German Sinti and Roma are exempt from the last criterion. They are recognized as a national minority although they live mostly as small groups in almost all parts of Germany and do not have their own specific settlement areas.

The aspect of tradition distinguishes the national minorities from immigrants, who have not traditionally resided in Germany. Unlike Jewish groups in some other countries, Germany's Jewish community does not consider itself a national minority, but a religious community^{)}.*

The size of the national minority groups in Germany is not officially surveyed: *No population or socio-economic statistics on the basis of ethnicity have been gathered in the FRG since the end of World War II. One reason for this is the persecution of ethnic minorities under the Nazi regime; another reason is considerations of international law. According to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, membership of a minority is an individual personal decision and is neither registered, reviewed or contested by the government authorities^{*)}.*

The regions where minority languages are spoken side by side with German are (cf. map Regions of regional and minority languages in Germany)

- the northern border strip of Schleswig-Holstein to Denmark where also Danish is spoken,
- districts in the north-west part of Schleswig-Holstein where North Frisian speaking people are living,
- a small range located in Lower Saxony, west of the city of Bremen, where Sater Frisian is spoken as well as
- areas of Brandenburg and Saxony near the border with Poland where the population is also speaking Lower or Upper Sorbian.

In almost all parts of Germany, Romany, the language of the German Sinti and Roma, is spoken by mostly small groups which do not have their own specific settlement area.

Low German has the status of a regional language preserving protection in the sense of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In the northern part of Germany Low German is being used in a broad variety of dialects/idioms in eight federal states.

Dialects are spoken in every German region (cf. map German dialects in Germany). Regarding the standardization of geographical names dialectal terms of geographical features in principle have been and are being considered, but the tendency towards standard spelling predominates. The dialectal spelling of geographical names is only of limited regional relevance. The degree of conforming to the standard language differs considerably in the various districts and regions of Germany.

Officially adopted geographical names in minority languages are currently in use in Frisian and Sorbian languages.

**) Text in italics from:*

Bundesministerium des Innern, National minorities, minority and regional languages in Germany, 3rd edition, Berlin 2015.

(<http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Broschueren/2016/national-minorities-minority-and-regional-languages-in-germany.html>)

Gebiete der Minderheiten- und Regionalsprachen in Deutschland Regions of minority and regional languages in Germany

Deutsch-dänisches und deutsch-friesische Sprachgebiete
German-Danish and German-Frisian language regions



- Internationale Grenze / International boundary
- Landesgrenze / State boundary
- Siedlungsgebiet der dänischen Minderheit
Settlement area of the Danish minority in Germany
- Historisches Siedlungsgebiet der Nordfriesen
Historical settlement area of North Frisians
- Festlandfriesisch / Continental Frisian
- Inselnfresisch / Insular Frisian
- Saterfriesisch / Sater Frisian
- Verbreitungsgebiet der Regionalsprache Niederdeutsch
Geographic range of the regional language Low German
- Amtlich festgelegtes Siedlungsgebiet der Sorben (Stand 2014)
Officially recognized as Sorbian settlement area (Status 2014)

Kartographie / Cartography:
Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie,
Frankfurt am Main, 2016

Deutsch-sorbische Sprachgebiete
German-Sorbian language regions



Deutsche Mundarten in Deutschland German dialects in Germany



50 km

- Gebiete deutscher Dialekte / Regions of German dialects
- Übergangsbereiche / Transition areas
- Grenze zw. hoch- und niederdeutschen Dialekten
Boundary between High and Low German dialects
- Grenze zw. ober- und mitteldeutschen Dialekten
Boundary between Upper and Middle German dialects

Nach:
König, W. [22a] und Wiesinger, P. [22b]
Kartographie / Cartography:
Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie,
Frankfurt am Main, 2010

*) Zur Bedeutung von „Hochdeutsch“
siehe Anm. in Kap. 1.2.2
Regarding the meaning of „High
German“ cf. chap. 1.2.2