UNGEGN | United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

UNGEGN's Divisions – Facilitating Dialogue Among Member States on Geographical Name Issues

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) works to promote the importance of, and demonstrate benefits arising from, the *standardization* of geographical names. Established on 23 April 1959, by resolution 715 A (XXVII) of the Economic and Social Council, UNGEGN is one of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UNGEGN convenes biennial intergovernmental meetings to provide a forum for dialogue among Member States, geographical name experts, international organizations, academia, and other observers. Geographical names standardization is the process of establishing and using consistent, officially recognized names for places, features, and regions on maps and in official documents, and UNGEGN is at the heart of ensuring that standardized geographical names can be used to ensure that everyone, governments, organizations, and the public, refer to the same places consistently and accurately.

As such, UNGEGN encourages every country to establish its own nationally standardized names, either through national names authorities or through other recognized administrative processes, such as through geographical name committees or establishing capacities within national geospatial information agencies. To deliver its work programme, UNGEGN maintains an architecture composed of 24 (at present) geographical and linguistic divisions, which facilitate discussions on geographical name standardization and other related issues within and between Member States with similar linguistic or geographic characteristics. This architecture is supported by a set of working groups that help advance the understanding of geographical name issues.

UNGEGN's Divisions provide a practical structure for cooperation among countries that share common languages, scripts, cultural, or geographic contexts. The divisions foster collaboration, dialogue, and technical exchange on the standardization of geographical names at regional and subregional levels. Crucially, while working groups are open to experts and observers, such as those from international organizations, UNGEGN's divisions are solely for Member State representatives; through participating in a division structure, Member States can:

- Share experiences, methodologies, and best practices tailored to their linguistic and cultural settings;
- Undertake joint projects and training on gazetteers, toponymic guidelines, and digital data management;
- Coordinate positions on technical and policy issues for presentation to UNGEGN sessions and its working groups;
- Strengthen regional and subregional capacity to implement internationally consistent naming standards.

By encouraging peer-to-peer cooperation, UNGEGN's divisions act as an essential bridge between national authorities and the global UNGEGN framework. They empower countries with shared characteristics to address common challenges collectively, avoid duplication of effort, and contribute more effectively to the international standardization of geographical names.

Currently, the UNGEGN Bureau and the Secretariat are renewing their contact databases for Divisions, guided by Decision 2025/4 of the 2025 UNGEGN Session, which encourages Member States to participate in divisional activities and revitalize inactive divisions. In this regard, Member States are invited to update their contact details with the Secretariat at geoinfo_unsd@un.org.

Further information can be found on the UNGEGN website at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn.