

WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (UNGEGN) AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

UNGEGN website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN>

The establishment of UNGEGN

“What is the standardized way of writing geographical names?” This was raised by the United Nations Cartographic Section of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the late 1940s. It was discussed in the 1950s and in response to ECOSOC resolution 715A (XXVII) of 1959, the first meeting of a group of experts was convened in New York in 1960. This group recommended that a UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be held. In 1967 this took place in Geneva, with the confirmation that national standardization should be the basis of international standardization.

The mandate and role of UNGEGN in promoting the standardization of geographical names

- UNGEGN is one of the seven expert groups of ECOSOC.
- UNGEGN is mandated to follow up on the implementation of resolutions and to continue activities between the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names held every five years.
- UNGEGN aims to emphasize the importance of the standardization of geographical names at the national and international levels, to show the benefits of this, and to assist countries in achieving standardization of geographical names where it is lacking.
- UNGEGN facilitates and encourages the discussion of the results of work on national standardization and arising issues, the dissemination of best practices, and a wide user community awareness of nationally authorized geographical names.

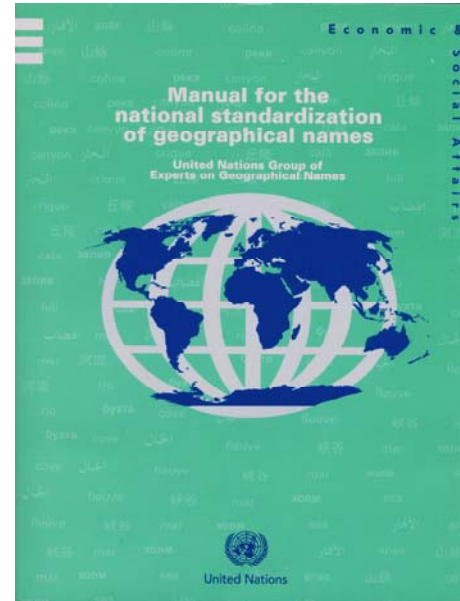


Some examples of progress in recent years:

- Offering training (e.g. field collection of names, processing the data, creating databases and producing gazetteers, establishing national names authorities). Recent courses have been offered in countries of Africa and Europe, as well as in Indonesia and Australia.
- Publications of UNGEGN:
 - A basic manual on setting up a national programme for the administration of a country’s geographical names (*Manual for the national standardization of geographical names*)
 - A technical manual with character sets for world languages, romanization systems and country names in the language(s) of the countries themselves (*Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names*)
 - A glossary of terms used in the standardization of toponyms (*Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names*)
 - Brochures indicating the benefits of consistent and unambiguous toponyms, and describing the use of names as keys to access georeferenced information
- Scientifically-based romanization systems have been approved for 30 writing systems

- Activities for countries in Africa have been coordinated and promoted since 2004, for example:

- Advocacy through coordination with other international organizations in Africa
- Promotion through presentations at conferences in Africa
- Cooperating with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to make available an Africa Gazetteer/database model
- Convening the 25th UNGEGN Session in Nairobi in 2009
- Offering training courses in toponymic administration for Africa (e.g. in Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Cameroon, Madagascar)
- Developing an action plan with UNECA leadership (Gaborone Action Plan, 2011)



- Examples of projects through Divisions and their regional meetings:
 - Asia South-East Division and Pacific South-West Division – development of a map and gazetteer of endonyms of the region
 - Dutch- and German-speaking Division – publications from meetings on cultural heritage, exonyms, minority languages
 - China Division – addressing the training necessary to process 20,000 new urban names annually
 - Norden Division (Scandinavian countries) – jointly encouraging the recording of Saami names in Norway, Sweden and Finland
- Web-based UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database ... including multilingual, multiscriptural data on names of countries, capitals and cities with a population over 100,000.

UNEGN provides a forum for discussion of good practices and methods, and for passing on information about national and regional projects

Examples include:

- island naming (some 17,000) in Indonesia
- e-learning in Australia
- laws for names in Norway and Estonia
- recognition of cultural heritage in China
- municipality amalgamation and name changes in Japan
- recognition of indigenous names – Canada, Australia
- recording and use of minority group names in the Netherlands, Spain
- processes for public participation in naming in South Africa and New Zealand
- development of geographical names databases as part of spatial data infrastructure – Finland, Germany
- networking of national databases in the EuroGeoNames project
- integrating geographical names in both mapping and statistical use – Brazil, Egypt

UNEGN Working Groups address many of these subjects (see UNGEGN website)

Other groups have expressed considerable interest in using standardized geographical names as promoted by UNGEGN

For example: United Nations Second Administrative Level Boundary (UN SALB) project; Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (UN OCHA); International Hydrographic Organization (IHO); Google Earth; and various atlas and reference book editors.