

---

**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names  
2021 session**

Virtual, 3–7 May 2021

Item 7 of the provisional agenda \*

**Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable  
development, measures taken and proposed for the  
implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the  
work of the Group of Experts**

## **Draft strategic plan and programme of work**

**Submitted by UNGEGN Secretariat \*\***

### **Summary :**

In its decision 2019/230, the Economic and Social Council decided that, in close consultation with States Members of the United Nations, the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names should undertake the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new Group of Experts, which, *inter alia*, should take into account:

- (a) The mandate and structure of the Group;
- (b) Support for the creation of new national geographical names authorities and strengthening the operation of existing ones;
- (c) The establishment of funding mechanisms (such as a trust fund) to support the implementation of the strategic plan;
- (d) Appropriate branding and publicity for the Group;
- (e) The focus and core goals of its parent body, the Economic and Social Council;
- (f) A suitable planning time frame.

It also decided that the draft strategic plan and programme of work would be circulated to Member States for consideration prior to adoption at the second session of the Group of Experts.

Pursuant to that decision, the full report provides a summary of activities conducted by the Bureau and the working group convenors since the first session of the Group of Experts to prepare the draft strategic plan and programme of work and the global consultation exercise conducted for the consideration of Member States.

---

\* GEGN.2/2021/1

\*\* Prepared by the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau and working group convenors

## **I. Background**

1. In 2017 the Group of Experts achieved significant milestones with changes in the working methods and operations when both the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) were discontinued and replaced by a new subsidiary of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) named the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The new body retained the mandates of the previous two where relevant, as well as the resolutions of the Conferences (E/RES/3028/2), and now convenes biennial sessions over a period of five days. Further to these changes, the Experts Group prepared a new Rules of Procedure, which was approved by ECOSOC in July 2018 (E/2018/264).

2. Post the new working methods and Rules of Procedure, the next logical and ideal course of action for the Expert Group would be the development of an overall strategic direction and work programme. This strategy would make the Group of Experts operations efficient, strengthen its alignment with other expert bodies of ECOSOC and, support the broader United Nations system including the 2030 Agenda. This suggestion was presented by the Secretariat in its report to the Group (GEGN.2/2019/5/CRP.5). The Bureau was asked to consider the development of a strategic plan and refined work programme which could take into consideration, rapid technological developments, priority geographical names standardization requirements of Member States, and supporting its parent body work on advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The suggestion was considered and approved by the Group of Experts at its first session in 2019. Decision 2019/230 recommended the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work. It is recognized that a strategic plan is a tool that guides an organization. A strategic plan coupled with its programme of work is designed to provide a forward and focused vision, enables increased operational efficiency, directs the prioritization of tasks, serves for the effective allocation of resources and importantly, supports the alignment of an organization's goals with that of its stakeholders. It is expected that the UNGEGN draft strategic plan and programme of work will achieve all the mentioned benefits.

4. This report provides a summary of activities conducted by the Bureau, the working group convenors and the UNGEGN Secretariat since the first session, which includes the development of the draft strategic plan and programme of work and the conduct of three global consultation exercises. The Group of Experts is invited to adopt the draft strategic plan and programme of work, and encourages the UNGEGN family of Member States, Linguistic and Geographical Divisions, and Working Groups to collectively work together, led by the Bureau to implement the plan and programme of work.

## **II. The Decision to prepare a draft strategic plan and programme of work**

5. At the first session of the "new" UNGEGN, convened from 29 April to 3 May 2019 in New York, the Group of Experts adopted the draft session report that included six recommendations and 15 decisions. These recommendations and decisions were adopted by the ECOSOC at its 36th plenary meeting 23 July 2019 (E/2019/99) Recommendation 1

(E/C.20/2020/17/Add.1) requested that the Bureau of the Group of Experts undertake the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new UNGEGN, to be presented for consideration at its second session in May 2021.

6. The decision is as follows:

- (a) Decided that, in close consultation with States Members of the United Nations, the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names should undertake the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new Group of Experts, which, inter alia, should take into account:
- i. The mandate and structure of the Group;
  - ii. Support for the creation of new national geographical names authorities and strengthening the operation of existing ones;
  - iii. The establishment of funding mechanisms (such as a trust fund) to support the implementation of the strategic plan;
  - iv. Appropriate branding and publicity for the Group;
  - v. The focus and core goals of its parent body, the Economic and Social Council;
  - vi. A suitable planning time frame.
- (b) Also decided that the draft strategic plan and programme of work shall be circulated to Member States for consideration prior to adoption at the second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

### III. The development processes

7. In pursuance of Recommendation 1, the Bureau and working group convenors with support of the UNGEGN Secretariat of the Group of Experts (hereafter referred to as the extended Bureau) undertook the preparation of the draft strategic plan and programme of work beginning in September 2019.

8. At the start of the exercise, the extended Bureau prepared a schedule and outline for the development of the UNGEGN draft strategic plan and programme of work. The schedule was amended over time given a multiplicity of factors. The actual time frames for each major task over the preparation process is shown in the table below.

<b>September -December 2019</b>	First global consultation. Call for submission of geographical names standardization issues and proposed priorities for action from Member States.
<b>June - August 2020</b>	Second global consultation. Circulation of initial draft strategic plan to Member States for review and comments.
<b>July/August 2020</b>	Comments received from Member States on the draft strategic plan. Bureau revises and updates document.

<b>February – March 2021</b>	Third global consultation. Circulation of comprehensive document of the draft strategic plan and programme of work to Member States for review and comments.
<b>March 2021</b>	Side event to the second session on the Draft Strategic Plan and Programme of Work
<b>May 2021</b>	Adoption of the draft strategic plan and programme of work at the second session of UNGEGN.

**Table 1** Timeline for the preparation of the draft strategic plan and programme of work

9. An early decision in the plan preparation process was deciding the planning time frame as per the requirements of Recommendation 1 (a)/(vi). Taking into consideration the time frame for the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, 2021 to 2029 was the agreed time horizon for UNGEGN’s strategic plan and programme.

10. An important element of the exercise as per Recommendation 1 (a) has been the engagement of Member State representatives, to ensure their contribution and transparency of the process. The first global consultation was carried out between October and December 2019, and was executed through [letter STAT 421 \(4-99\) of 15 October 2019](#) from the Director of UN Statistics Division. Member States were invited to submit their national geographical names standardization issues and propose priority actions to be pursued by the Group of Experts over the period 2021 to 2029. Based on the feedback received from ten Member States (Argentina, Canada, Chile, Egypt, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Netherlands and Republic of Korea), the extended Bureau prepared the first version of the draft strategic plan which outlined the proposed vision, values, aims and five overall strategies. See Figure 1 for the five strategies—the pillars of the draft strategic plan.

11. The second round of global consultations on the draft strategic plan was done from June to August 2020. The process was initiated by way of [letter STAT 421\(4-112\) of 3 June](#) with a six page [draft strategic plan](#) from the Director of the UN Statistics Division. Based on the feedback received from 20 Member States (Argentina, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Jordan, Madagascar, New Zealand, Norway, Russian Federation, Slovakia and United States of America) and three international organizations (International Cartographic Association, International Geographical Union and International Hydrographic Organization), and many hours of thorough evaluation and discussions, the extended Bureau revised the draft strategic plan and prepared an accompanying programme of work.



**Figure 1 Five strategies – the pillars of the draft Strategic Plan**

12. The third round of global consultations was initiated through [letter of STAT421\(4-120\)](#) dated 17 February 2021, with the accompanying 38-page comprehensive document containing the five strategies and related action items. Member states were invited to review and provide feedback, paying particular attention to each of the five strategies and related action items. Eighteen responses were received from the following Member States: - Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Burundi, Cameroun, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Germany, India, Japan, Peru, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Turkey. While the number of responding Member States is not statistically significant, the response rate is line with those from the other global consultation exercises. Notably half of the responding Member States had no comments and or indicated that they were in agreement with the contents of the document.

13. In order to provide the UNGEGN community with a clear overview on the contents of its draft Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2019, and to gain additional feedback for finalizing the document, a virtual side event to the 2021 UNGEGN session was held on Thursday 25 March 2021. The side event was attended by 124 toponymic experts, cartographers, linguists and other stakeholders from around the world. The UNGEGN Vice Chair from the Republic of Korea and the Chair of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding, from Norway, presented the UNGEGN draft Strategic Plan and Programme of Work. They spoke on: 1) why a strategic plan? What are the benefits? 2) the development process 3) the structure and main contents of the plan and programme of work, 3) financing, implementation, monitoring and updating and 4) the way forward. This was followed by open discussions moderated by the Director UNSD. Participants from Austria, Latvia and Egypt provided comments and had their questions answered.

14. An integral component of the exercise was making the documents readily available and accessible and informing Member States on the progress of the exercise. This was made possible with the use of letters, email reminders and the creation of a special subject webpage [UNGEEN Draft Strategic Framework](#). The webpage gives an overview of the exercise, and the documents circulated under each global consultation. The documents are also available

for downloading, with the plan and work programme in Word format to facilitate insertion of comments and edits.

#### **IV. The draft strategic plan and programme of work**

15. The draft strategic plan and programme of work presented as a background document to this report, presents the vision, values and aims of UNGEGN, together with the following five strategies and their collective alignment to the relevant goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- a. Technical expertise
- b. Relationships, links and connections
- c. Effective work programmes
- d. Culture, heritage and language recognition
- e. Promotion and capacity building

16. For each strategy, the main achievements, current status and future needs are noted, followed by the presentation of the Programme of Work responsibilities, outputs and time frames up to 2029.

17. Two sections of the document are devoted to financing and monitoring, reporting and evaluation. In addition, the document includes a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), a brief history of UNGEGN, the current organization chart, and a proposed implementation framework.

18. It is to be noted that the draft strategic planning exercise is an ongoing process and therefore UNGEGN's draft strategic plan and programme of work is to be considered a living document, subject to continued reassessment and revision. The extended Bureau recognizes that its work will be subjected to unanticipated opportunities and threats which will impact the strategies and programme of work, thus necessitating corresponding response and revision of the document. The Bureau and the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation with the support of the Secretariat of the Group of Experts will be responsible for tracking and monitoring the implementation of the plan, proposing adjusting and amending as deemed necessary, in addition to reporting the progress and proposed future plans to the Group of Experts at its biennial sessions.

19. An important component of the draft strategic plan and programme of work is the funding streams needed to support its implementation. The financing approach is outlined in section 5 iv of the programme of work which recommends the creation of a trust fund to support primarily capacity building. The extended Bureau recognizes that additional work needs to be done on financing, which includes identifying work areas requiring funding with an accompanying funding prospectus.

20. Another important area of future work is the review and evaluation of the current thematic areas of work addressed by working groups and tasks leads. Notwithstanding that current working groups have been given responsibilities for each task, detailed in the draft implementation plan, it is anticipated that based on further evaluation and assessment of the

new work streams, a realignment of work will be necessary. This exercise may result in the disbanding of existing working groups and or the creation of new ones. The extended Bureau recognizes this as a next necessary step to further refine the strategic plan and programme of work.

## **V. Points for discussion**

### **21. The Group of Experts is invited to:**

- (a) Take note of the present report and draft strategic plan and programme of work and express its views on the efforts of the extended Bureau, to provide guidance on the future activities of the Group of Experts on working towards its vision and mandate;
- (b) Express its view towards adoption of the draft strategic plan and programme of work 2021 to 2029, provided as a background document to this present report, noting that it has been developed and reviewed through three global consultations with Member States and relevant international technical organizations;
- (c) encourages Member States, UNGEGN Linguistic and Geographical Divisions, and Working Groups to collectively work together, led by the extended Bureau to implement the plan and programme of work and;
- (d) Provide guidance on further work to be done to improve the programme of work, including preparation of the financial prospectus, to establish the trust fund and an evaluation of existing working groups and task teams to effectively and efficiently undertake the implementation of the strategic plan.