



**Proposed modalities on the arrangements for the work of the
United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
at its 2021 session, 3-7 May 2021 (virtual)**

1. We are about to embark on a very unique session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGE GN), against the background of an ongoing serious and unprecedented health crisis which makes it necessary to react responsibly, putting the safety and health of delegates and the staff of the Secretariat and their families first. At the same time, we must also show that we are pragmatic and sensible to the pressing priorities while ensuring business continuity and the fulfillment of the responsibilities attributed to this Commission.
2. It is anticipated that the physical distancing guidelines and constraints related to the ongoing situation of the COVID-19 global pandemic will continue to impact the work of the 2021 session of the ECOSOC, including with respect to its subsidiary bodies scheduled to meet during the first quarter of 2021.
3. In this regard, the President of ECOSOC in his letter dated 3 December 2020, encouraged the Chairs of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies to exercise flexibility in preparation of their sessions in 2021, and attached for their consideration a paper entitled, “Consideration of Implication of COVID-19 related limitations on in-person meetings for sessions of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies during the 2021 session of the Council”.
4. The Bureau virtually met on 19 January to discuss the options on the way forward and brainstormed the contingencies in light of the recent developments. The Bureau considered the ongoing extraordinary and unprecedented situation of the global pandemic, the continued risks and restrictions associated with international travel by representatives from capitals, quarantine requirements of the host country, as well as the guidance from the President of ECOSOC and UN Occupational Safety Health. Considering these limitations and guidance received, the Bureau also recognizes that during Phase II of the Secretary-General’s reopening plan, virtual meetings remain the preferred format. Therefore, holding of in-person meetings of the 2021 session of UNGE GN was not recommended.
5. Bearing in mind the prevailing conditions, the official guidance received from the President of ECOSOC, and building on the recent experiences from convening of the other subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC in 2020, the Bureau recommends, on exceptional basis and without setting any precedent, a combination of convening of informal meetings on a virtual platform with remote simultaneous interpretation, together with proceeding with a portion of the work of UNGE GN during its 2021 session through correspondence. In this context please refer to paragraph 8 of the attached paper from the President of the ECOSOC entitled, “Consideration of Implication of COVID-19 related limitations on in-person meetings for sessions of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies during the 2021 session of the Council”.



6. These limitations require from all of us an important degree of flexibility. The Bureau of the UNGEGN hopes that these limitations are taken into consideration by all Member States when working on the organization of work of the Group of Experts and also during the preparation and development of its substantive work. (General discussion on virtual platform and inputs to draft decisions).

7. The aim of these proposals is to explain the way in which the work of the Group of Experts is going to be conducted, and to serve as the basis for the advanced version of the draft programme of work (L.1 annexed). This paper is subject to revision in light of the evolving situation concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and the related safety and health guidelines implemented at the UNHQ.

8. The proposals outlined in this document would only be applied as a temporary one-time measure during the extraordinary circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and would not create a precedent for the work of the Group of Experts.

9. Taking all this into consideration, the Bureau would like to present the following modalities proposals that have informed the advanced version of the draft programme of work (L.1) annexed to this paper.

A. Structure of the Programme of Work

10. There will be 10 informal meetings of the 2021 session of the Group of Experts convened on the virtual platform supported by the UN Secretariat, and will be provided with the remote simultaneous interpretation in six official languages. The Secretariat will reach out to delegations for training (onboarding) sessions on using the virtual platform with interpretation. Each virtual meeting will be of two hours; 9 -11 a.m. and 3-5 p.m. scheduled for 3-7 May 2021.

B. General Discussion

11. The format of general discussions will continue to remain as with physical meetings in previous sessions, with some exception to new steps that include; the submission of written statements, informing the secretariat in advance of the meeting of the delegation's intention to speak per agenda item, and additional time constraints impacting the length of for speaking at the virtual meetings. For each agenda item the chair will invite pre-identified representatives to introduce their papers, followed by interventions from delegations who informed the Secretariat of their intention to speak under that agenda item. The presiding officer of the agenda item will then deliver the summary of the discussion.

12. Due to the virtual nature of the session and the limited time of the meetings, Member States and entities participating in the work of the 2021 session are invited to **submit written statements and interventions starting 14 April 2021.**



- a. Written statements referring to specific agenda items can be submitted by the Heads of Delegation or designated officials on their behalf (as provided in formal notification to the Secretariat).
- b. Under each agenda item, a template for statements will be available on the UNGEGN 2021 session's website.
- c. Delegates are invited to submit the form, preferably as a pdf file, to the Secretariat (blake1@un.org and frani@un.org).
- d. All forms received will be time-stamped and uploaded to the UNGEGN 2021 session website, in the language received, as soon as feasible (except over weekends).
- e. Please use a separate form for each agenda item. The submission of written statements will help facilitate discussions and general debate.
- f. Due to the potential volume of submissions in a condensed period, we encourage written statements to be brief, provided in English if possible, focused on the main discussion items for the Group of Experts, and should be provided to the Secretariat by **23 April 2021**.

13. Keeping in mind that the standard duration for provision of remote simultaneous interpretation for virtual meetings is two hours, delegations **intending to speak at the virtual meetings** will be encouraged to indicate to the Secretariat (cianciulli@un.org; frani@un.org; blake1@un.org) their intention to take the floor, in advance of the meeting.

- a. Delegations are asked to take into account capacity limitation of the virtual platform and to ensure that those who access the platform are accredited participants.
- b. The maximum time for national statements will be 2 minutes and for group (Divisional/Regional) statements it will be 3 minutes.
- c. The delegations are encouraged to submit their statements in written form, which will be posted on the website of UNGEGN.

C. Action on proposals

14. As noted in the guidance provide by the President of ECOSOC in his 3 December 2020 letter, that “in case the situation does not permit in-person meetings of the bodies and should no other means of taking action be available, proposals (which are usually recommended for adoption by ECOSOC), could be considered directly by the Council when the relevant agenda item is considered at the management segment meetings later in the year”. Moreover, the Chair intends to approach the President of ECOSOC to consider forwarding to the Council members the Group of Expert's request that it be allowed to take decisions also by **silence procedure** given the special circumstance in which UNGEGN operates. Should that be approved, the draft report of 2021 session of the Group of Experts including the text of the draft decisions could be adopted under silence procedure on the basis of a special approval from ECOSOC bearing in mind the specificity of UNGEGN and its inability of taking action at in-person meetings.

15. The Chair and the Bureau will make every effort for the conduct of the virtual meetings and consultations occur in an open, inclusive, efficient and structured manner while ensuring contribution from all stakeholders prior to decision making by silence procedure.



D. Side events

A limited set of side events directly related to specific agenda items will be held virtually. Consistent with the practice of UNGEGN, the main sponsors will be in charge of arranging their side event and providing their own platform to hold the event.