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Geographical Names
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Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda *

**Cooperation and liaison with other organisations: Committee
of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.**

Report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

Submitted by the secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial
Information Management **

Summary

The report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management covers its activities that are relevant to the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The Group of Experts is invited to review the report and express its views on the efforts to strengthen collaboration in furthering the standardization of geographical names.

At its eleventh and twelfth sessions, held virtually on 23, 24 and 27 August 2021 and from 3 to 5 August 2022, respectively, the Committee of Experts welcomed the reports of the Group of Experts (see [E/C.20/2021/15](#) and [E/C.20/2022/18](#)). In 2021, the Committee supported efforts and actions for strengthening interaction and collaboration between the Bureaux of the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts, including opportunities for partnership such as sharing technical expertise and geographical names data, pursuing joint capacity-building initiatives, raising awareness of the importance of toponymy, sharing guidelines, methods and practices for the standardization of geographical names and the preservation of native place names derived from Indigenous languages. In addition, the Committee encouraged Member States to improve communication, coordination and cooperation between geospatial information management authorities and geographical names authorities at the national and regional levels, including across thematic areas.

In 2022, the Committee noted the importance of standardized geographical names and toponymic guidelines, as an important element of a country's Indigenous languages and linguistic and cultural heritage, and urged Member States and their national mapping and geospatial agencies to develop and adopt toponymic guidelines in collaboration with their national geographical names authorities. In addition, the Committee supported the collaborative project proposal to develop a compendium of

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** Prepared by the secretariat of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

institutional arrangements on shared good practices for geographical names standardization between national mapping and geospatial agencies and national names authorities, to increase cooperation, create synergies and share knowledge and good practices for the standardization of geographical names.

The report provides a summary of relevant activities since the eleventh session of the Committee of Experts, in particular the work being done to implement the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework; the efforts to strengthen global geospatial information arrangements, including the establishment of the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre in Deqing, China, and the United Nations Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence in Bonn, Germany; and an overview of relevant highlights of the second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress, held in Hyderabad, India, from 10 to 14 October 2022.

I. Background

1. This report describes the activities conducted by the Committee of Experts during the intersessional periods (between the 2021/second and 2023/third) of the sessions of the Group of Experts). This includes a summary of relevant activities since the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the Committee of Experts, and also identifies issues for consideration.

II. Overview of activities of the Committee of Experts in the intersessional period

Eleventh Session of the Committee of Experts

2. At its eleventh session, held virtually on 23, 24 and 27 August 2021, the Committee of Experts welcomed the report¹ prepared by the Group of Experts and congratulated the Group of Experts on the adoption of its strategic plan and programme of work 2021–2029 at its session held virtually in May 2021, and noted that the strategic plan would assist the Group of Experts to fulfil its goals, encourage and assist in the creation of geographical names authorities, provide information to external bodies including the Committee of Experts and promote collaboration between United Nations bodies towards wider standardisation of geographical names.

3. The Committee supported efforts and actions for strengthening interaction and collaboration between the Bureaus of the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts, including opportunities for partnership such as sharing technical expertise and geographical names data, pursuing joint capacity-building initiatives, raising awareness of the importance of toponymy, sharing guidelines, methods and practices for the standardisation of geographical names and the preservation of native place names derived from indigenous languages, as part of the cultural heritage of a country. The Committee also encouraged Member States to improve communication, coordination and cooperation between geospatial information management authorities and geographical names authorities at the national and regional levels, including across thematic areas, to strengthen geospatial information management, noting that geographical names were an essential referencing component for geospatial data infrastructures and geospatial knowledge networks and a vital part of a country's linguistic and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Committee of Experts acknowledged the importance of standardised geographical naming for integrative information management, underpinned by innovations in methodology and technology for the development of national geographical names databases and web services for a variety of purposes, including in health care and emergency response, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Committee also noted the recommendations of the Group of Experts for revitalising and activating its geographical and linguistic divisions and national names authorities and establishing a trust fund to support the implementation of its strategic plan and programme of work 2021–2029 with emphasis on capacity building for Member States, focused on training initiatives to strengthen skills in the principles and techniques of geographical naming, and its suggestion to explore collaborative projects to safeguard cultural heritage.

¹ see [E/C.20/2021/15/Add.1](#)

Twelfth Session of the Committee of Experts

4. At its twelfth session, held in New York on 3 – 5 August 2022, the Committee of Experts welcomed the report² prepared by the Group of Experts, and noted the progress in implementing its Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, including the work to redevelop the World Geographical Names database with standardised and innovative interfaces. The Committee noted the importance of standardised geographical names and toponymic guidelines, as an important element of a country's indigenous languages and linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as its semantic topographical characterisation, which support cartographers in the production of maps with authoritative geographical names, and urged Member States and their national mapping and geospatial agencies to develop and adopt toponymic guidelines in collaboration with their national geographical names authorities. The Committee also expressed its appreciation for the joint capacity-building webinar on the theme "Geographical names standardisation supporting national development", convened in collaboration with the Caribbean Geospatial Development Initiative of the Regional Committee on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, the Committee noted the continuing efforts to build a stronger relationship between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts, and supported the collaborative project proposal to develop a compendium of institutional arrangements on shared good practices for geographical names standardisation between national mapping and geospatial agencies and national names authorities, to increase cooperation, create synergies and share knowledge and good practices for the standardisation of geographical names. It also noted the convening by the Group of Experts of a webinar on the theme "Linked open data developments: what's in it for UNGEGN and its experts?" on 30 September 2022 and the third biennial session of the Group of Experts from 1 to 5 May 2023 in New York and encouraged the participation of representatives of national mapping and geospatial agencies.

III. Intersecting the work of the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts

5. In the intersessional period, ECOSOC adopted resolution³ 2022/24 entitled "Enhancing global geospatial information management arrangements". This outcome was pursuant to the Council's request in its resolution⁴ 2016/27 on "Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management", for the Committee of Experts to report back no later than five years (see [E/2022/68](#)). ECOSOC adopted its resolution 2022/24 that acknowledged the achievements and progress made by the Committee of Experts in the area of global geospatial information management and its contribution to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilisation in developing countries. The Council also reiterated the importance of strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of the Committee, particularly for the achievement of its operations focused on the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, to strengthen and ensure its continued effectiveness and benefits to all Member States. ECOSOC decided to enhance the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council in charge of all matters

² see [E.C.20/2022/18/Add.1](#)

³ see [E/RES/2022/24](#)

⁴ see [E/RES/2016/27](#)

related to geospatial information, geography, land administration and related topics, in accordance with the terms of reference annexed to its resolution.

6. In its reports tabled under the agenda item⁵ on “Strengthening Geospatial Information Management” at its eleventh and twelfth sessions, the Committee of Experts detailed its practical and strategic actions undertaken to implement resolution 2016/27 and strengthening geospatial information management in Member States. Notably, in its decisions 11/101 at its eleventh session and 12/101 at its twelfth session, the Committee of Experts highlighted specific initiatives aimed at improving and strengthening national geospatial information management in Member States. This section highlights some key work items under the Committee of Experts that may be of interest to the Group of Experts.

United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework

7. The United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (UN-IGIF) served as a key umbrella for the many activities under the purview of the Committee of Experts, including the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management regional committees and thematic networks, which could be applied to any country to guide transformational change⁶. The Committee of Experts, at its eleventh session, further emphasized that the UN-IGIF now provided an overarching paradigm to further strengthen nationally integrated geospatial information management, not only for Member States that were in the early stages of adopting national spatial data infrastructures but also for those that had already successfully implemented spatial data infrastructure capabilities and that the development of their respective country-level action plans as a means of strengthening national geospatial information management at the institutional level and supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals⁷.

8. The intersessional period has seen significant progress to advance and implement the UN-IGIF. Notably, at its eleventh session the Committee of Experts adopted decision 11/103, in which it recognised the efforts by the High-level Group of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (HLG-IGIF) to quickly establish itself and develop an ambitious plan to provide the strategic leadership and guidance to implement the UN-IGIF. Moreover, the Committee endorsed the strategic plan developed by the High-level Group and supported the three priority goals identified for immediate attention, they are i) improve communication, ii) strengthen capacity development, and iii) mobilise sustainable funding, which will serve as a means for developing the High-level Group’s plan of work for the next two years. The Committee of Experts also welcomed the formation of the SDG Data Alliance that would focus on how geospatial information was, and could be, used to support local to global Sustainable Development Goal indicator initiatives⁸.

Establishing Centres of Excellence

9. In the intersessional period, the Committee of Experts, through its Secretariat has overseen the establishment of two centres of excellence, the United Nations Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence (UN-GGCE) and the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre (UN-GGKIC).

⁵ see [E/C.20/2021/4/Add.1](#) and [E/C.20/2022/5/Add.1](#)

⁶ see E/2021/46; Decision 10/103

⁷ see E/2022/46; Decision 11/103

⁸ see E/2022/46; Decision 11/105

10. The UN-GGCE, situated at the United Nations campus in Bonn, Germany was formally opened on 29 March 2023. The overarching goal of the UN-GGCE is to assist Member States and geodetic organizations to coordinate and collaborate to sustain, enhance, access, and utilize an accurate, accessible, and sustainable Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF) to support science, society and global development. The objective of the UN-GGCE is to support the implementation of General Assembly resolution 69/266⁹ entitled “A Global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development” through strengthening and advancing: global geodetic cooperation and coordination; worldwide geodetic infrastructure; standards and policies; education, training and capacity development; and communication and awareness, while also coordinating measures and overseeing their implementation.

11. The UN-GGKIC, situated in Deqing County, Zhejiang Province, China was inaugurated, virtually, in May 2022. The overarching goal of the UN-GGKIC is to develop and promote the required innovation, leadership, coordination, and standards to strengthen the adoption of geospatial information to support the implementation of national development priorities and the SDGs. Leveraging the UN-IGIF, Member States will have the ability to integrate and deliver national geospatial information policy, data, systems, services and capabilities into national government development policies, strategies, and arrangements. The objective of the UN-GGKIC is to strengthen and advance the geospatial information management capacity and capabilities of Member States, especially developing countries, and to strengthen knowledge sharing and innovative cooperation.

The Second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress

12. On 10 to 14 October 2022 the Government of India through its Ministry of Science and Technology hosted the second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (UNWGIC) at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre in Hyderabad, India. The theme was ‘Geo-Enabling the Global Village: No one should be left behind’. In his message, the UN Secretary-General welcomed the theme and appreciated the outreach to the next generation with a dedicated youth forum. This 'youth forum' was the special event titled 'Geo-enabling the Global Village with Generation Z and Alpha' where school children and teachers from eighteen schools across India presented their geospatially enabled sustainability projects.

13. The second UNWGIC underscored the importance the UN-IGIF to achieving the SDGs, addressing climate-related challenges and as a means of ensuring no one is left behind. The Congress program, from 11 – 13 October 2022, had three plenary sessions with nine keynote presenters with diverse experience and perspective, and from varied backgrounds and geography. Each keynote presented addressed the principal focus of the plenary sessions – supporting sustainable development and the wellbeing of society; embracing digital transformation and technological development; environmental and climate challenges and reinforcing the importance of working together. Alongside the plenary sessions were four special sessions that were essentially panels comprising predominantly panelists representing national agencies from Member States, and a further forty thematic parallel sessions. Within the Congress week, from 10 – 14 October 2022, there were two special events with particular focus on children, youth and the under-represented, eight side events, and three formal meetings.

⁹ see [A/RES/69/266](#)

IV. Collaborative Activities

14. As part of the efforts to strengthen relationship between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts, activities included: (i) The Committee's participation at the second session of the Group of Experts; (ii) the Group of Experts participation in the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the Committee of Experts; (iii) a proposed collaborative project between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts.

Participation of the Committee of Experts at the second session of the Group of Experts

15. The report¹⁰ (GEGN.2/2021/13/CRP.13) of the Committee of Experts to the 2021/second session of the Group of Experts was delivered virtually by its Co-Chair of the Committee of Experts who is from Belgium. The report contained updates on the Committee of Experts intersessional activities which included the convening of the High-Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, held virtually in May and June 2020, work being done on the UN-IGIF, the completion and adoption of third edition of the "Future Trends in Geospatial Information Management (the 5- to 10-year vision)" document and the "COVID-19: Ready to Respond" document which is a summary of the response of the geospatial community to the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN-GGIM Co-Chair in her conclusion reiterated their support to the work of the Group of Experts

Participation of the Group of Experts at the eleventh and twelfth Sessions of the Committee of Experts

16. The Group of Experts presented reports to the Committee of Experts under the agenda item "Strengthening of collaboration with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names". At the eleventh session of the Committee of Experts in August 2021, its Chair from France presented the Group of Experts' report. At the twelfth session, the Group's report was presented by its a Working Group Convenor on Geographical Names Data Management, from Germany¹¹. The Committee of Experts welcomes the continued support of the Group of Experts in this regard.

Collaborative project between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts

17. At its twelfth session, the Committee of Experts noted the importance of standardised geographical names and toponymic guidelines, as an important element of a country's Indigenous languages and linguistic and cultural heritage and urged Member States and their national mapping and geospatial agencies to develop and adopt toponymic guidelines in collaboration with their national geographical names authorities.

18. Further details on the collaborative project between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts are in the report¹² "Cooperation and liaison with other organisations: Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management", tabled at this present session.

¹⁰ see [GEGN.2/2021/13/CRP.13](#)

¹¹ see [E/C.20/2022/18/Add.1](#)

¹² see [GEGN.2/2023/115/CRP.115](#)

V. Issues for Consideration

19. The General Assembly resolution 74/303¹³, encourages ECOSOC, as the parent body of both the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts, to create synergies and coherence among its subsidiary bodies, to address gaps, overlaps, and duplication in their respective agendas, both as they relate to the 2030 Agenda and as a whole. The Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts will explore and identify potential areas for collaboration and joint activities noting that Geographical Names is one of the adopted Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes. Further, the Committee of Experts continues to support the efforts of the Group of Experts in the implementation of its Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 – 2029.

20. The following potential areas for collaboration are being brought to the attention of the Group of Expert for their consideration: (i) at the national level where national mapping agencies/geospatial information management agencies and national geographical names authorities are separate organizations, both may consider forging links to share and exchange technical expertise, share geographical names data, and conduct joint data collection exercises among other cost-saving and efficiency initiatives; (ii) work jointly to encourage and communicate the benefits of geographical names standardisation and the importance of creating geographical names authorities; (iii) pursue joint capacity development initiatives particularly for those countries in transition and on the cusp of implementing national geospatial information management strategies; and (iv) the Group of Experts support the promotion and implementation of UN-IGIF Strategic Pathway 4 - Data.

¹³ see [A/RES/74/303](#)