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English

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

**2023 session**

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Item 4 a) of the provisional agenda \*

**Reports; Governments on the situation in their  
countries and on the progress made in  
the standardization of geographical names**

## **Report of Sweden**

Submitted by Sweden \*\*

### Summary

The present report presents a summary of the major activities undertaken by Sweden since the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. It provides in particular highlights of government initiatives aimed at increasing support for national minorities and minority languages in Sweden. Since 2022, the Institute for Language and Folklore has hosted language centres for Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani čhib and Yiddish with the main purpose of promoting and fostering the increased use and knowledge of these minority languages. In 2022, the Swedish Riksdag adopted a law on a consultation scheme for the Saami people. The scheme means that the government and state administrative authorities are obliged to consult representatives of the Saami people before making decisions on matters that have special significance for the Saami, including within the fields of culture, languages and place names.

The report provides information on the revised fourth edition of *Toponymic guidelines for cartography: Sweden*, developed through collaboration between the Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority of Sweden (Lantmäteriet) and the Institute for Language and Folklore. The revised publication is supplemented by an adjustment in the spelling of the Saami languages, given that Pite Saami received an official orthography after the previous edition. The update is aligned with recent changes in map production.

The full report provides a short overview of the Swedish legislation and the main authorities involved in the standardization of geographical names, as well as a presentation on some updates of the register of geographical names at the Institute for Language and Folklore.

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## Swedish national name standardization

### Legislation and policies on geographical names standardization

In 2000, provisions on ‘good place-name practice’ were introduced into Swedish law. They are contained in a section of the Historic Environment Act (Sw. *Kulturmiljölagen*), underlining the aim of preserving place-names as part of the intangible cultural heritage. Briefly, good place-name practice means not changing place-names that are established by long usage unless there is good cause to do so, and spelling place-names in accordance with accepted rules of linguistic correctness. Since Sweden is a multilingual country, the national minority names are to be used as far as possible in parallel with Swedish on maps and road signs. The supervision of the Act is the responsibility of the Swedish National Heritage Board (Sw. *Riksantikvarieämbetet*). The authority oversees the law, and does so by participating in the Place-Names Advisory Board (see below).

The Act applies to central and local government activities relating to place-names and makes clear that the names approved by Lantmäteriet are to serve as a guide. These names have been scrutinized by place-names experts and have assumed the role of a standard.

The section in the Historic Environment Act emphasizes on preserving place-names as part of the nation’s cultural heritage. This legislation contributes to enhance culture, heritage and language recognition as highlighted in strategy 4 of the strategic plan and serves as an example that promotes good naming practices.

*The Place-Names Advisory Board (Sw. *Ortnamnsrådet*)* is an advisory body to Lantmäteriet, Sweden’s national place-names authority. Its main responsibilities are to work with Lantmäteriet to develop principles and formulate goals for a sound policy relating to place-names and to promote good place-name practice in the country. The members of the Board are drawn from Lantmäteriet, the Institute for Language and Folklore, the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Sami Parliament, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Transport Administration and the universities.

The Place-Names Advisory Board has no formal decision-making powers, but acts in an independent capacity, providing advice and promoting dialogue. In that role, it seeks to guide local authorities and other name givers and to ensure that good place-name practice is observed in activities relating to place-names. The Board has published a guide on place-name standardization, *The Swedish Place-Names Advisory Board’s Guide to the Standardisation and Preservation of Place-Names*. The guide informs about the legislative concept of good place-name practice.

The Board has been successful in its efforts to support good policies on geographical names standardization. The collaboration between different stakeholders from central government, technical and academic bodies has created positive synergies in line with strategy 2 of the strategic plan Relationships, links and connections. The Board has also delivered policy guidance and encouraged the exchange of knowledge and good practice with special attention to strategy 3 Effective work programmes.

### Place-names in central and local government

*Lantmäteriet* serves as Sweden’s national place-names authority. Its responsibilities in that area are to officially adopt place-names, coordinate the place-name activities of central government, and make recommendations relating to place-names. Lantmäteriet’s work relating to the standardization and

preservation of place-names is designed to promote a system of place-names that is well managed and fit for purpose.

The responsibility of *the Institute for Language and Folklore* (Sw. *Institutet för språk och folkminnen*) is to collect, preserve, research and make material relating to place-names available to the public. Its place-name work is carried out at departments in Gothenburg and Uppsala, and its collections of place-names comprise, in all, some 10 million index cards. As an authority responsible for standardization and preservation of place-names, the Institute comments on applications concerning the adoption of place-names and scrutinizes proposed names for use in official maps and basic geodata. Most of this is done collaboratively with Lantmäteriet, a form of cooperation that has existed in various forms for over a century. The Institute also give advisory service for example to municipalities, the Church of Sweden and the Swedish government.

*The Sami Parliament* in Sweden is both a popularly-elected parliament and an administrative authority under the Swedish government. The Sami Parliament also has the role of an advisory board and expert on Sami issues. When it comes to place-names the Sami Parliament has the responsibility to comment on applications concerning the adoption of Sami place-names and to scrutinize proposed names for use in official maps and basic geodata.

The local, municipal governments of Sweden (290 in all) are responsible for urban toponymy (streets, squares, parks, city blocks etc.) as well as for urban and rural addresses, which contain a considerable number of place-names.

### **Government initiatives supporting national minorities and minority languages in Sweden.**

The Swedish Riksdag has adopted a law on a consultation scheme for the Sami people. The consultation scheme means that the government and state administrative authorities are obliged to consult representatives of the Sami people before making decisions on matters that have special significance for the Sami people. The aim is to promote the influence of the Sami people over their affairs. This may concern issues within the field of culture, language and place-names. This obligation will also apply to the Swedish municipalities from 2024.

Minority languages have been emphasized in different governmental investigations over the last years. The Institute for Language and Folklore has as part of a government assignment established language centers for four national minority language groups, for Finnish in Uppsala, and for Yiddish and Romani language in Stockholm in the mid part of Sweden, and for Meänkieli in Kiruna and Övertorneå in northern Sweden, where most Meänkieli speakers live. The centers will host in total a dozen language promoters, with assignment to actively promote and stimulate increased use of the minority languages in society. The centers will assist with expertise and develop methods to strengthen the minorities conditions to use and reclaim their languages and spread knowledge about revitalization. Children and young people are given special priority. A language center for the Sami languages is hosted by the Sami parliament since 2010.

### **Toponymic guidelines for Cartography**

A revised fourth edition of *Toponymic guidelines for Cartography: Sweden* has been digitally published and accessible from the webpage of *Lantmäteriet*. The fourth edition is developed through a collaboration between *Lantmäteriet* and the *Institute for Language and Folklore*.

The publication presents information on languages, names authorities, source materials and administrative divisions. The revised publication is supplemented by an adjustment in the spelling of

Sami, as Pite Sami has received an official orthography since the previous edition. The update takes also into consideration recent changes in map production.

### **The Geographical Names Network**

The Geographical Names Network is concerned with geographical names of all kinds, but its main focus is on how foreign names should be handled in Swedish and how Swedish place-names should be used in international contexts. The network brings together a range of organizations involved in various ways with names and their standardization. The network includes representatives of Lantmäteriet, the Institute for Language and Folklore, Uppsala University, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Radio Sweden, the Swedish Standards Institute (SIS), the EU institutions, and the Institute for the Languages of Finland and expert terminologists.

The network is consulted on particular questions related to names, including those relating to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' publication *Utrikes namnbok*. In addition, the network's activities encompass a wide range of other name issues, including foreign personal names, names of organizations and authorities, and official titles in the public sector. The network publishes its recommendations (in Swedish) on the webpage [Råd och rekommendationer - Institutet för språk och folkminnen \(isof.se\)](https://isof.se).

The booklet *Utrikes namnbok* contains names of Swedish government agencies, Swedish organizations and EU bodies, Swedish titles used in the public administrative system and country names. The terms are given in seven languages: Swedish, English, German, French, Spanish, Finnish and Russian.

The main body of the text in the *Utrikes namnbok* is written in Swedish, but the multilanguage list can be used without knowledge of Swedish. The terms listed in the sections on agencies and organizations (Myndigheter och organisationer) and titles (Titlar) are only applicable to the Swedish administration and cannot be applied to corresponding organizations in other countries. The country names are the official names used by Sweden. The booklet can be downloaded from the webpage for Government Offices of Sweden: [Utrikes namnbok - Regeringen.se](https://regeringen.se).

### **Recent articles and books on geographical names and geographical name standardization by Swedish experts**

Andersson, Daniel & Edlund, Lars-Erik. 2021. *Att synliggöra samiska ortnamn i Sverige. Riktlinjer, praxis och vägar framåt*. [Making Sami Place-Names Visible in Sweden. Guidelines, Practices and Ways Forward.] In: Kaisa Rautio Helander, Aud-Kirsti Pedersen & Mikkel Rasmus Logje (red.), [Navn på minoritetsspråk i muntlige og skriftlige sammenhenger – Minoritehtagielaid namat njálmálaš ja čálalaš oktavuodain](#): Rapport fra NORNA 49 symposium i Kautokeino 24.-25. april 2019 – Raporta NORNA 49. symposias Guovdageainnus cuoŋománu 24.-25. beivviid 2019. (*Dieđut 1/2021; NORNA-rapporter 99.*) Guovdageaidnu: Sámi allaskuvla, pp. 211–224.

Dehlin, Lennart. 2021. Granskning av samiska ortnamn. Utvidgat samarbete inom den samiska onomastiken mellan Lantmäteriet, Sametinget och Institutet för språk och folkminnen. [Survey of Sami place names. Extended co-operation in the field of Sami onomastics between Sweden's Land Survey, the Sami Parliament and the Institute for Language and Folklore.] In: Kaisa Rautio Helander, Aud-Kirsti Pedersen & Mikkel Rasmus Logje (red.), [Navn på minoritetsspråk i muntlige og skriftlige sammenhenger – Minoritehtagielaid namat njálmálaš ja čálalaš oktavuodain](#): Rapport fra NORNA 49 symposium i Kautokeino 24.-25. april 2019 – Raporta

NORNA 49. symposiums Guovdageainnus cuoŋománu 24.-25. beivviid 2019. (*Diedđut 1/2021; NORNA-rapporter 99.*) Guovdageaidnu: Sámi allaskuvla, pp. 225–238.

Järlehed, Johan, Löfdahl, Maria, Milani, Tommaso, Nielsen, Helle Lykke & Rosendal, Tove. 2021. Entrepreneurial Naming and Scaling of Urban Places. The Case of Nya Hovås. In: Katharina Leibring, Leila Mattfolk, Kristina Neumüller, Staffan Nyström & Elin Pihl (red.), [\*The Economy of Names. Values, Branding and Globalization\*](#). *Proceedings of Names in the Economy 6, Uppsala, 3–5 June 2019*. Uppsala: Institutet för språk och folkminnen, pp. 71–86.

Karlsson, Björn, Neumüller, Kristina & Pihl, Elin: Toward digital spatiality. Rethinking the world's largest place-name collection. In: Petrulevich, Alexandra & Simon Skovgaard Boeck 2023a (red.) (in press): *Digital Spatial Infrastructures and Worldviews in Pre-Modern Societies*. York: ARC Humanities Press. OA.