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English

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 14 of the provisional agenda *

Geographical names data management

Monitoring of the availability of free, easily accessible and authorized data on digital geographical names

Submitted by Germany**

Summary:

The Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management has responsibility for all subtasks/actions in Strategy 1 ‘Technical Expertise’ of UNGEGN’s Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 and has started to work on most of the actions, amongst others, on action 1-iii-8. Action item 1-iii-8 seeks to “Monitor the availability of free and easily-accessible authorized digital geographical names data as it is seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardized geographical names.”¹

Action Item 1-iii-8 is relevant to aim IV of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work which aims to “Enhance, nationally, regionally and globally, the maintenance and dissemination of standardized geographical names data (.).”

This paper describes the approach and the feedback provided by countries and the current status as well as the planned next steps.

The main goal of the task has been to provide UNGEGN and all member states with an overview of all free and easily-accessible authorized digital geographical name data. The plan is to update the respective UNGEGN sub-website which contains links to geographical names databases for as many countries as possible:
<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/geonames.html> .

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** Prepared by Victoria Fölsing (Germany) and Marija Brnot (Slovenia)

¹ https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/documents/UNGEKN_Strategic_Plan_2021_V4.pdf. It will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2023/74/CRP.74, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/3rd_session_2023/

Monitor the availability of free and easy-accessible authorized digital geographical names data

1. Background

The Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 was adopted at the 2nd session of UNGEGN in May 2021. All member states, Divisions and Working Groups were invited to begin the implementation.

Shortly after the UNGEGN Session the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management started to identify the points of the strategy to which it could contribute. It turned out that especially action items, which belong to strategy 1, fall into the expertise of the Working Group.

Subitem iii from strategy 1 “Technical Expertise” is “Identify trends on developments and future direction for geographical names data management and encourage the use of innovative methods, integrated approaches and technological advances to further the aims of UNGEGN”.

This paper provides an overview of the processing of action item iii-8 to date and a view on further developments. Action item iii-8 reads “Monitor the availability of free and easily-accessible authorized digital geographical names data as it is seen as a key driver in encouraging the use of nationally-standardized geographical names”.

2. Approach

First, the task was divided into work packages and a goal of the action item was defined as follows:

1. Compilation of the existing data sources
2. Check whether the data is free and easily-accessible
3. Review every year
4. Encourage more member states to provide authorized geographical names data
 - a. Draft a dissemination and communication plan
 - i. Articles in the Bulletin
 - ii. Presentation at national, regional and international conferences/workshops

The main goal of the task should provide UNGEGN and all member states with an overview of all free and easily-accessible authorized digital geographical name data. The plan is to update the respective UNGEGN sub-website which contains links to geographical names databases for as many countries as possible: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/geonames.html>.

Work began in the fall of 2021 to collect and compile existing data sources through internet research. Since it was not easy to get reliable information which countries already provide free and easily-accessible authorized digital geographical names data, a short questionnaire was sent out per Mail to the Division Chairs in April 2022. The Division Chairs were asked to distribute these within the Division. Through this channel, 26 feedbacks were collected and documented in the Working Group wiki.

As this way brought only few feedbacks, a contribution was published in the UNGEGN Bulletin No. 64 from November 2022. The article included the following short questionnaire which was sent out to the Division Chairs.

1. Does your country provide authorized digital data on geographical names?
2. Is it free and/or easily-accessible?
3. Where can we find it (link)?
4. In which language is the data accessible?
5. If 1. or 2. is answered „no“: Can you explain why?

Unfortunately, the feedback on the article was very limited.

3. Further actions

The 3rd UNGEGN Session is another opportunity to approach all member states. If you want to provide a link to free and easily-accessible data for the UNGEGN Subsite, please let us know. The feedback (links, answers, comments) is most welcome from all Member States! Please send a note to: victoria.foelsing@bkg.bund.de and marija.brnot@gov.si.

In the following month the results of the survey will be send to the Secretariat with the request to publish them on the website. Of course, links can be added to the UNGEGN website at a later date. But by sending the results, the WG considers action Item iii-8 as done for the time being.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Express its views on the approach presented in the discussion paper
- (b) Contribute further information and feedback regarding the questionnaire until the end of 2023