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

Report of Latvia

Submitted By Latvia **

Summary

The national report covers the two-year intersessional period, 2021–2022 of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The full report provides information on the situation (including developments, processes and events) in Latvia with respect to the standardization of geographical names in following areas:

- International activities
- National geographical names authorities
- Legislative basis
- Geographical names collection (except developments in crowdsourcing carried out by Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia)
- Databases/registers (Place Names Database of Latvia, National Address Register, Latvian Place Names Card Index, etc.)
- Promotion of Indigenous Livonian place names
- Consulting on toponymy
- Publications and educational events
- Treatment of names on maps and map browsers
- Exonyms and country names

The report includes links to web sources (including legislative acts) on Latvian geographical names and the contact information of the relevant institutions.

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REPORT OF LATVIA

The report covers the two-year period 2021-2022 (between the 2nd and the 3rd Session of UNGEGN).

I. International activities (UNCSGN Resolutions VI/1, IV/24, II/20)

Latvia is a member state of the Baltic division of UNGEGN. Experts of Latvia participated in the 2nd Session of the (new) United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) (New York, 3 - 7 May 2021) and in the 21st Meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN.

Latvia is represented on the Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032) as a member state and as a co-chair (2022–2023) and has participated in developing the Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032) where Latvia has advocated for inclusion using of indigenous place names (Activity 5.2.; <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379851>; “elaborating policy guidelines for the public information space in Indigenous languages including extension of use of Indigenous names and words to official signage, focusing on place name signs in areas traditionally inhabited by Indigenous Peoples”)

Latvia was represented in the 27th International Council of Onomastic Sciences and in the XIII International Congress of Balticists in 2021.

II. National activities

1. Names authorities (UNCSGN Resolution I/4 A.)

There are no changes regarding the structure and responsibilities of Latvian geographical names authorities during the reporting period.

The decision makers (having rights to adopt the official names) are:

<i>No.</i>	<i>Names authorities</i>	<i>Features which names they shall assign or approve</i>
1.	Parliament and Government	Units of administrative and territorial division
2.	Distinct ministries	State protected areas and cultural monuments, public transport features, maritime navigation features, quarries, forestries etc.
3.	Latvian Geospatial Information Agency	Natural features
4.	All municipalities	Addressing system features (villages and smaller), parts of towns, parts of villages, artificial water bodies, small hydroelectric power stations, parks, cemeteries, immovable property (real estates), and other man-made features including natural, historical and cultural monuments of local significance

Controlling and advisory body is the State Language Centre. A consultative expert body with recommendatory rights, the Place Names Sub-commission of the Latvian Language Expert Commission, the State Language Centre, appraises the official name proposals, takes care of straightening out Latvian toponymy and protection of geographical names as a cultural heritage. It

consists of 9 experts in linguistics, geography and cartography. The Sub-commission should be in session at least once per 2 months, the consulting and conclusion-making via e-mail is being practiced, too.

Consulting and scientific bodies are: the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, the Latvian Language Agency and the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency.

In 2023, in cooperation between State Language Centre and the consulting institution for the Latvia's indigenous Livonian language – University of Latvia Livonian institute – a creation a Livonian language sub-commission is planned. The sub-commission among other tasks will be responsible for the standardization of the place names in Livonian.

In 2021-2022, the State Language Centre continued working on a voluminous conclusion regarding the official name proposals (for more than 4.000 natural features) submitted by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency. According to the Regulations Regarding Geographical Names Information, the conclusion is a basis for approving official names for all kinds of geographical features.

Beyond this, 963 conclusions regarding the official names proposals for: 1 county name (in Livonian), 1 locality name, 105 street names, 38 public road names, 4 public park names, 1163 real estate names, 5 lake names, 7 lake bay names, 7 river names, 3 river arm names, 1 river bay name, 4 spring names, 6 pond names, 13 marsh names, 1 ditch name, 1 meadow name, 1 hill name, 1 reservoir name, 1 gulf name, 1 strait name, 2 dune names, 6 cape names, 31 railway station names, 90 names for mighty trees, as well as 536 proposals for postal addresses were prepared and submitted to responsible place names authorities during the reporting period.

2. Legislative basis (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4, VII/5, VIII/9)

The main legislative acts regarding the geographical names standardization in Latvia remain the same as during the previous reporting period: the *Official Language Law*, the *Geospatial Information Law* and the *Regulations Regarding Geographical Names Information* (Regulations on Toponymic Information).

The *Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas* (prescribing the basic procedures on naming of relevant features) and the *Regulations on the Address System* (regulating also the naming of addressing system features) have a positive impact on the geographical names standardization, too.

An **administrative-territorial reform** has been carried out in 2020-2021. The main outcomes of it:

- 1) **A new administrative-territorial division** of Latvia;
- 2) **Reduced number of local governments** – 43 local governments instead of previous 119. (Borders of lower-level territorial units remained unchanged except slight changes due expanding territories of few towns);
- 3) **Five villages have become towns** (Koknese, Iecava, Ādaži, Ķekava, Mārupe);
- 4) **Expanded criteria for recognizing official villages to fit also small settlements:** a new type of settlement was introduced – *small village* – a historically formed settlement with dominant disperse built-up area or dominant concentrated built-up area, which has no defined boundaries in the county's territorial planning. Therefore, villages registered in the Address Register without defined village boundaries in the territorial planning are considered *small villages* from July 1, 2021. This allowed to keep almost 5 000 settlements registered in the National Address Register and opened registration of other *small villages*.

In connection with the administrative-territorial reform a new version of the *Regulations on Addressing* was issued on June 29, 2021. In accordance with the updated *Law on Administrative Territories and Settlements* adopted on June 10, 2020, the Regulations are supplemented with an updated list of addressing objects. Elements to be included in the address, and address records specification are prescribed. However, the basic principles of address writing remained the same as before. In addition, an explanation has been prepared for local governments on the correct formation of the names of address objects in order to ensure their compliance with the *Official Language Law* and regulatory enactments on place names.

On June 16, 2021, the Parliament (Saeima) passed the new *Law on Latvian Historical Lands* aiming to create the necessary preconditions for strengthening the common identity of the population and for the preservation and sustainable development of the cultural and historical environment and cultural spaces of the historical Latvian lands.

Amongst other the law stipulates:

"4.(7) The state and relevant municipalities ensure the preservation and sustainable development of the identity and cultural-historical environment of the indigenous (autochthonic) inhabitants of Latvia – Livonians, as well as the preservation of their cultural-historical heritage, including by promoting the learning and use of the Livonian language, as well as **introducing and using place names in Livonian language in the environment.**"

"4.(8) The state and relevant municipalities ensure the preservation and sustainable development of the Latgalian identity and cultural-historical environment, including by promoting the learning of the Latgalian written language as a variant of the Latvian language, including in educational institutions, and its use in public events and daily work, as well as by **restoring and using in the environment place names in Latgalian, including on road signs, in naming of places and streets.**"

Therefore the Law encourages a wider use of toponymic information in Livonian language and official variety or Latvian – Latgalian written language as well.

2 laws (*Civil Law. Annexes* and *Fishery Law*) and *Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on protected geological and geomorphological natural monuments* containing lists of geographical names revised and updated by Latvian Geospatial Information Agency in collaboration with State Language Centre in 2018-2020, were amended in 2021-2022. Total number of names in these legislative acts exceeds 600.

3. Field collection of place names (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4 B, VII/5)

The **field collection** of place names has continued mainly in a framework of student tutoring and a scientific research work at the University of Latvia and some other institutions of higher education.

Crowdsourcing website with electronic place names database *Tautas vietvārdu datubāze* (<https://vietvardi.lv/talka/>) is maintained by the Latvian Language Institute and the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Sciences of the University of Latvia since February 2017. It is open for any interested person and enables to register a place name, its spelling and pronunciation, localization (in the parish and on the map), cultural, historical and linguistic data of the place name. More than 6 000 names have been collected so far. A new platform of crowdsourcing tool for collecting Latvian place names (<https://vietvardi.lu.lv>) currently is being developed. The new tool will allow to register place names via geographical map. Celebratory opening of it is planned for June, 2023 – in Valmiera (the place where Jānis Endzelīns (1863-1961), the outstanding Latvian linguist, author of the

dictionary of Latvian place names was born; his 150th anniversary is included in the list of celebration and anniversaries 2022-2023 associated with UNESCO).

4. Toponymic data files and gazetteers (UNCSGN Resolutions I/4 E)

The Place Names Database of Latvia maintained by the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (Laboratory of Toponymy) contains 183.8 thousand names of 131.6 thousand features (data on January 2, 2023). Each entry contains information on kind of feature, names of parts of the feature (if existing), a reference to the relevant map, the name of the administrative/ territorial area, in which feature lies, official name (if approved), recommended name, other names etc. The location of named features basically is characterized by the coordinates of the point, centre of areal feature, mouth of flowing water feature. Besides that, all flowing water features, areal natural features are characterized by rough geometries (lines and areas of extent of their names). Drawing of rough areas to indicate the extent of villages, forests, bogs, meadows and named areas started in 2013-2014, was continued extensively in 2020-2022.

The new application of the database was launched on January 9, 2023.

The concise public version of the Place Names Database (8th edition, containing more than 140 thousand names of 111 thousand geographical features located in Latvia) is available at <http://vietvardi.lgia.gov.lv> (user interface in Latvian only, a brief description in English is available at <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/place-names-database-0>).

Latvian Geospatial Information Agency prepared and published in its website the place names dictionary **"Lakes in Annexes of the Civilian Law. Geographical dictionary of place names"** on 2022 (.pdf file, free download at: <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/sites/lgia/files/document/VARDNICA.pdf>). The dictionary comprises 417 names of lakes and reservoirs included in *Civil Law. Annexes*. Each entry contains information on the water body and its names from the Place Names database as well as data from topographic maps.

The National Address Register maintained by the State Land Service includes names of all administrative territories and territorial units of Latvia (36 counties, 511 civil parishes, 81 cities and towns), 6 272 officially recognized villages (including 1359 villages and 4913 small villages), 18 374 streets, 222 050 houses, other buildings and land units intended for buildings (data on January 04, 2023). Names search in the State Address Register is available on the data distribution portal of the State Land Service of Latvia at: <https://www.kadastrs.lv/> (interface in Latvian and English). Search of real estate names is also available there. Textual and spatial data cover all the territory of Latvia.

The Latvian Place Names Card Index (or card file) (approximately 1 000 000 domestic geographical names) is maintained by the Latvian Language Institute, University of Latvia, since the very beginning of the 19th century (no public access). The cards comprise mainly linguistic information. Digitized basic part of the Card Index – 842 000 scanned place names cards – is available for scientific research and place names standardization purposes now (by the request).

The Card Index serves as the main source for compiling the **comprehensive linguistic dictionary "Latvijas vietvārdu vārdnīca" (Dictionary of Latvian Place Names**, in Latvian, with preface in English). A new volume of the dictionary with toponyms "Sgajevski-Sļozovka" is being edited now (approximately 21.000 place names are arranged in etymological nests and edited, supplemented with grammatical, historical, cultural data). The volume will be published in 2024.

The Electronic Historical Latvian Dictionary (<https://tezaurs.lv/lvvv/>) based on the "Corpus of Early Written Latvian Texts" (<http://www.korpuss.lv/senie/>) comprises now 612 historical proper names from historical sources (search query for place names is *nloc*. 'nomen loci').

5. Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names (UNCSGN Resolutions VIII/1, IX/5)

The *Official Language Law* determines that the state shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Livonian language as the language of the indigenous (autochthonic) population. Names of places in the Livonian coastal territory shall also be created and used in Livonian.

The *Official Language Law* also determines that the State shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as a historic variant of the Latvian language.

The Livonian Institute of the University of Latvia (within the research project) has carried out identification of place names in Livonian and standardization of them. Currently 1140 names have identified, work is ongoing.

The Institute has created and maintains a **database of Livonian place names** with 1150 Livonian place names **and a Livonian place names map**. Public version of the database and the map both are accessible at: <https://livonian.tech/en/> .

Identifying and reconstruction of place names in the historical Livonian area with intension of using these names in the public space has been done. The first Latvian/Livonian road sign has been installed by Talsi municipality in Northwestern Latvia on February 20th, 2023

The above-mentioned *Law on Latvian Historical Lands* adopted in 2021 facilitated standardization of place names in Livonian for road signs (starting from August 2021), and identical efforts in Latgale, where the first Latvian/Latgalian road signs were installed on November 18, 2021.

In 2023, for implementing the *Law on Latvian Historical Lands*, the state budget, among other, provides funding for complete replacement of existing road signs with bilingual ones in territory of the Livonian Coast as well as for installation of 80 Latvian/Latgalian road signs in Latgale. Opportunities to install additional signs of historical place names also are planned (mainly in coastal zone of Limbaži and Sigulda counties).

The **Livonian Language Commission**, whose tasks include Livonian language and Livonian place names standardization and consulting on language issues starts its work in 2023.

6. Toponymic education, consultations, exchange of knowledge on domestic and foreign names (UNCSGN Resolution VII/9)

On October 2022, the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia in collaboration with Latvian Geospatial Information Agency, the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Latvia as well as the Preiļi municipality organized **Place Names Day** in Southern Latvia – in Galēni parish. The most distinct (Latgalian) dialect is used there and place names sometimes are written in Latgalian written language as a historic variant of the Latvian language.

Regional Place Names Days are organized every year since 2018 (the only exception was 2021 – due the Covid -19 pandemic). The aim is – to promote awareness of regional place names, their importance and role, to summarize the results, exchange experience, impressions and opinions. A short but intensive place names collection fieldwork involving local people was carried out. Presentations about regional place names, their significance and georeferencing was given for schoolchildren and other public in Galēni elementary school and culture house. The event ended with local place-names quiz and a concert. More than 300 place names were collected during the event.

The Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia continued to consult on place names. More than 100 answers on toponomastic issues were given for state institutions and all interested citizens during the reporting period.

Consultations on the spelling of foreign geographical names, etc. are available at the Department of Language Development of the Latvian Language Agency. The public webpage <http://www.valodaskonsultacijas.lv> maintained by Latvian Language Agency offers answers to various questions about the spelling and pronunciation of the Latvian language, including information on the geographical names of Latvia.

Articles on Latvian toponymy have been included also in a book on Latvian surnames (Mežs I., Jansone I.I., Rapa S., R., Kovaļevska, O. *Latviešu uzvārdi arhīvu materiālos: Vidzeme = Latvian Surnames in Archival Sources. Vidzeme*) Rīga: LVA, 2022, pp. 47–84) and in a periodical, devoted to language practice (Valodas prakse: vērojumi un ieteikumi = *Language practice: observations and recommendations*) Nr. 17. Rīga: LVA, 2022, pp. 161–210), both issued by the Latvian Language Agency.

A new issue of the journal of the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia – “Onomastica Lettica VII” is being prepared. The volume will comprise 10 articles on the origin, semantics, history, standardization, structure and perception of place names.

The Latvian Geospatial Information Agency deals with information on its work on geographical names standardization and other toponymic issues in the section “Areas of Work” (<https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/areas-work>) of its website.

7. Geographical names in cartography (UNCSGN Resolution VII/5)

The most significant state cartography projects regarding the geographical names are:

1) The **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:10 000** (2792 sheets) is being prepared in digital version only. The 4th edition is in process. The toponymy for this map is being compiled and updated by cartographers using geographical names data from the Place Names Database and the National Register of Addresses, with advice/assistance of the Laboratory of Toponymy. The 4th edition is very special in sense that the first time in the practice of Latvian national cartography, the cartographic features such as watercourses and waterbodies are linked with the UID of the features of the Place Names Database.

2) The **Topographic Map of Latvia, scale 1:50 000** (131 sheet) is being prepared in digital and printed versions. The 3rd edition in digital version was completed in 2020. All the toponymy for this map was updated by the Laboratory of Toponymy; The new 4th edition is being prepared now.

Toponymic work at the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency as far as it is possible follows the principle stated in the UN resolution VII/5 in 1998 - geographical names standardization, based on a local usage of the local place names forms (collected through the extensive field work during 1990-s and elaborated and updated along with the cartographic production updating cycles).

The **Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser “LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks”** offers search and viewing geographical names on the latest versions of different maps of Latvia in scales 1: 1 000 000 - 1:10 000 (the central part of Riga at scale 1: 2 000) prepared by this institution. Names from the Place Names database along with address feature names from the National Address Register and administrative and territorial unit names can be used for the search. Rough geometries from the Place Names Database illustrating names extent are also accessible there. The Map Browser is available at <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv>. The version for mobile phones is accessible at: <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv/mobile>.

The private cartography and geospatial intelligence solution company “*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*” is the only enterprise in Latvia preparing world and national atlases and cartographic editions for schools. The **map viewer “Baltic Maps”** (<http://www.balticmaps.eu>) maintained by the company offers geographical names search on the maps prepared by “*Jāņa sēta Map Publishers*”. Geographical names are presented in original languages (in original script (if Latin) or romanized).

8. Exonyms and country names (UNCSGN Resolutions VI/10, V/11)

As Latvian is a flexive language, it is impossible to keep most of the foreign geographical names unchanged or without endings in Latvian. Moreover, the cultural-historical value of traditional Latvian exonyms is recognized. *Regulations on the Toponymic Information* state the preservation of them.

The responsible **authority for standardization of the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names** is the Latvian Language Experts Board at the State Language Centre. The State Language Centre's website, section „*Latviešu valodas ekspertu komisija*” (Latvian Language Experts Board), maintains a list of standardized Latvian names of the countries and regions of the World (*Valstu un teritoriju atveidojumi latviešu valodā*), available at: [Latviešu valodas ekspertu komisija | Valsts valodas centrs \(vvc.gov.lv\)](http://www.vvc.gov.lv), subsections "Par pasaules valstu un teritoriju nosaukumiem latviešu valodā" (basic list) and "Par pasaules valstu un teritoriju nosaukumiem latviešu valodā, papildināts" (amendments). A list of Latvian names of the countries and regions of the European Union Member States (*Eiropas Savienības dalībvalstu reģioni*) is available at: <https://www.vvc.gov.lv/lv/media/152/download?attachment>.

Latvian Language Experts Board at March 9, 2022 decided upon rendering in Latvian the names of 3 Ukrainian cities closer to their original Ukrainian form than it was before: Київ – Kijiva (Kijeva); Харків – Harkiva (Harkova); Львів – Ļviva (Ļvova). The possibility to use former traditional forms was kept when necessary because of the historical context.

The most extensive Latvian database comprising Latvian exonyms and renderings is maintained by the private cartography and geospatial intelligence solution company SIA “*Jāņa sēta*”.

It contains 218.000 geographical names in their original languages, as well as exonyms and renderings: 91.000 – into Latvian, 34.000 – into Estonian, 14.000 into Lithuanian, 10.000 into Russian (no public access).

9. List of links

A. Legislative Acts

- 1) Official Language Law (Valsts valodas likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/14740-official-language-law>;
- 2) Regulations Regarding Geographical Names Information (Vietvārdu informācijas noteikumi): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/243610-regulations-regarding-geographical-names-information>;
- 3) Geospatial Information Law (Ģeotelpiskās informācijas likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/202999-geospatial-information-law>;
- 4) Law on Administrative Territories and Populated Areas (Administratīvo teritoriju un apdzīvoto vietu likums): <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/315654-law-on-administrative-territories-and-populated-areas>
- 5) Regulations on Addressing (Adresācijas noteikumi), in Latvian only: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324387-adresacijas-noteikumi>;

- 6) Laws and Regulations of the Republic of Latvia in English:
<https://www.vvc.gov.lv/en/latvijas-republikas-tiesibu-akti-anglu-valoda> .

B. Geographical names and maps of Latvia

- 1) Place Names Database of Latvia (Latvijas Vietvārdu datubāze), public version (in Latvian only): <https://vietvardi.lgia.gov.lv/>, brief description in English: <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/place-names-database-0>;
- 2) Database and Map of Livonian Place Names: <https://livonian.tech/en/> (data base: <https://livonian.tech/en/>; map: <https://livonian.tech/en/>, (database also at: <http://www.livones.net/lili/en/vietvardi/>);
- 3) Standardized Names of Countries and Territories in Latvian (including capital cities): <https://www.vvc.gov.lv/lv/media/152/download?attachment>.
- 4) Data distribution portal of State Land Service of the Republic of Latvia (textual and spatial data in National Real Estate Cadastre information system and in National Address Register): <https://www.kadastrs.lv/>
- 5) Latvian Geospatial Information Agency Map Browser (LĢIA Karšu Pārlūks) <https://kartes.lgia.gov.lv/karte/>;
- 6) Geoportal of Latvia: <https://geolatvija.lv/geo/mapviewer>;
- 7) Digital map collection of the Latvian National Library with Georeferenced map viewer (maps from 17th century to contemporary): <https://kartes.lndb.lv/>;
- 8) Dodies.lv historical map portal: <https://vesture.dodies.lv/>
- 9) GISNET Map Browser: <http://kartes.gisnet.lv/>
- 10) “Jāņa Sēta” Map Browser _Balticmaps: <https://balticmaps.eu/lv>

C. Open data and INSPIRE data sets on territory of Latvia

- 1) <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/place-name-data-open-data>
- 3) <https://www.lgia.gov.lv/en/inspire>
- 2) <https://geolatvija.lv/geo/search> (open data on place names, administrative territories, cadastral units, addresses)
- 3) <https://inspire-geoportal.ec.europa.eu/>

10. Further information may be obtained from:

Latvijas Ģeotelpiskās informācijas aģentūra

(Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA))

Ojāra Vācieša iela 43
 Rīga, LV-1004, Latvia

www.lgia.gov.lv

Phone: (+371)28655590

e-mail: info@lgia.gov.lv

(Ms. Vita Strautniece, Laboratory of Toponymy; e-mail: vita.strautniece@lgia.gov.lv)

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