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English

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

**2025 session**

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

**Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda \***

**Reports: Divisions of the Group of Experts**

## **Report of the Norden Division**

Submitted by Norden Division\*\*

### Summary

The Norden Division maintained its active engagement in geographical names standardization through regular online meetings between the 2023 and 2025 sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The Division conducted four strategic meetings during that period: one each in 2023 and 2024, and two dedicated preparatory meetings for the 2025 session.

The virtual gatherings served as a platform for members to present their ongoing work and discuss both shared challenges and country-specific issues in geographical names standardization. The meetings also facilitated knowledge exchange and the coordination of divisional activities. The Division Chair regularly updated members on developments from the Bureau of the Group of Experts, sharing insights from meetings with other Division Chairs. This ensured the alignment of divisional activities with broader objectives of the Group of Experts.

The full divisional report will include detailed information about members' contributions to the 2025 session through their individual reports and working papers, demonstrating the Division's commitment to advancing geographical names standardization.

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\* GEGN.2/2025/1

\*\* The full report was prepared by Emily Lethbridge (Iceland, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies) and Peder Gammeltoft (Norway, University of Bergen).

This is the report of the Norden Division, compiled on activities undertaken from May 2023 to April 2025. Broadly speaking, our activities contribute towards the five UNGEGN strategies in providing a focus for sharing technical expertise (Strategy 1), developing relationships, links and connections (Strategy 2), developing effective work programmes (Strategy 3), acknowledging and promoting ways in which geographical names are part of cultural heritage (Strategy 4), and encouraging promotion and capacity building with regard to various aspects of the standardisation of geographical names.

## **1. Membership of Norden Division 2023-2025**

Countries that form the Norden Division are: Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The list of active members currently stands at around twenty individuals, with good representation from government, national mapping authorities, national language councils, and academic institutions. Some changes in personnel occurred during the period under review (representatives from Finland and Sweden stood down) but, happily, there was no lack of continuity regarding overall participation thanks to good forward-planning.

Of the seven countries in the Division, three (Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland) have notably small populations on a global scale (under 60,000 in the case of Faroes and Greenland; under 400,000 in the case of Iceland). The challenge of continuous, active representation from these member countries is thus a constant and real one. Representation from Iceland has been safeguarded for the foreseeable future (three individuals are currently involved); representation from Greenland has doubled (from one to two individuals as of 2024) and is thus stronger; representation from Faroe Islands remains most vulnerable, with only one individual nominated in an official capacity. The Chair and Vice-Chair worked actively at establishing better contact in this latter case, with some success, but the challenge of safeguarding participation for the future remains. Another key dimension of Norden Division membership touches on the representation of indigenous peoples. As one of the three main institutions responsible for geographical names in Norway, delegates representing the Sámi Parliament attend Norden Division meetings and have attended UNGEGN Sessions in the past (two delegates attended in 2023). Unfortunately, none will attend the 2025 session. This situation was noted as detrimental by the Division and a statement in the form of a letter from the Division Chair and Vice-Chair that outlined the importance of active participation by Sámi Parliament delegates in UNGEGN activities was sent to the Parliament in early 2025.

## **2. Meetings held by Norden Division 2023-2025**

Meetings have been the principal joint activity of Norden Division members in the period 2023 to 2025. One in-person meeting was held by the Norden Division while the 2023 UNGEGN Session was in progress, on 2nd May 2023. Subsequently, three online meetings were held via Teams in the intervening period, on the following dates:

- 28th June 2024 (attended by 17 members representing Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)
- 8th January 2025 (attended by 15 members representing Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)
- 5th March 2025 (attended by 14 members representing Denmark, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden).

At each meeting members of the Norden Division presented ongoing work and discussed current issues, both shared and specific to individual countries. On behalf of the Norden Division, the Chair Emily Lethbridge (Iceland) attended meetings for Bureau and Division Chairs held

between the 2023 UNGEGN session and the 2025 UNGEGN session, reporting from these meetings at Norden Division meetings.

An ongoing issue has been the lack of a UNGEGN-maintained webspace to archive Division documentation. In 2024, the Chair created a Microsoft Sharepoint private group for members of Norden Division to access shared documentation as a short-term solution. In practice this has not worked well, not least on account of complicated permission settings and access issues outside of the Chair's host institution. Providing secure and straightforward access to Division working documents thus remains a challenge.

### 3. Summary of issues and topics discussed at Norden Division meetings

#### 3.1. Progress and challenges of individual countries regarding standardisation of geographical names

Ongoing work and collaboration at a national level between mapping agencies, place-name committees or language councils, other government bodies and academia was reported for each country at division meetings. While full details for each country are found in the country reports but developments reported on by member countries which have a bearing on the common work of standardisation of geographical names across the Division include:

##### *Organisational/infrastructural changes*

- **Faroe Islands:** Nautical Chart of Faroe Islands was transferred to the Faroese Department of Environment; the nautical mapping co-operation agreement between Faroe Islands and Denmark was renewed.
- **Finland:** organizational changes will take place in 2026 when the Institute for the Languages of Finland will merge with the National Agency for Education; an official contract between the Institute for the Languages of Finland and the University of Oulu concerning verifying Sámi place-names in the place-name register of the National Land Survey has come into force.
- **Greenland:** the place-names register was moved to the Basic Data Programme.
- **Iceland:** a new place-name committee was appointed for the period 2024-2028; National Land Survey of Iceland merged with Icelandic Institute of Natural History and the Mývatn Research Station to form the Natural Science Institute of Iceland in 2024.

##### *Development and mainenance of geographical names web services*

- **Denmark:** work was conducted on updating the Danish Mapping Agency's register of geographical names; work was conducted on updating the Place-Name Committee's register of geographical names (*Danmarks Stednavne*), in conjunction with the University of Copenhagen's Archive for Name Research.
- **Finland:** development of the information cards service for geographical names continued and the production version will be published in coming years (beta version, <https://tietokortit.maanmittauslaitos.fi/nimisto>).
- **Greenland:** a new geographical names webpage was launched in May 2024 (<https://nunataqqi.gl>).
- **Iceland:** work continued on adding geographical names to the national geographical names database (<https://ornefnasja.lmi.is/mapview/?application=ornefnasja>); updates were made to the user interface of the national place-name register database (<https://xn--nafni-mta.is/>).

- **Norway:** a new geographical name service for use in standardization and research was published by the Norwegian Language Collections at the University of Bergen (<https://stadnamnportalen.uib.no>).
- **Sweden:** work was conducted on linking the Swedish Mapping Agency's geographical name register to all other parts of the agency. Work on a new geographical names database by Lantmäteriet will begin in 2026, and involves co-operation with Estonia and Faroe Islands.

### 3.2. Handover of Norden Division leadership

This was a major issue that needed a solution over the period 2023-2025. Disruptions to the older model of rotating chairship caused by various reasons meant that Iceland and Norway took on the roles on a transitional basis between the 2021 and 2023 sessions, while a longer-term solution was sought. At the in-person meeting held at UNHQ in May 2023, the Chair (Iceland) and Vice-Chair (Norway) agreed to remain in position until the next session in 2025. Further discussion about logistics took place at subsequent ND meetings. Following negotiations between Sweden and Finland, these two countries volunteered to take over from Iceland and Norway and the proposal was accepted by the Division's members.

The handover will take place during the 2025 UNGEGN Session. Sweden will take on the position of Chair and Finland the position of Vice-Chair for the period 2025-2029.

The situation underlined the importance of having a robust model that looks ahead to the future in place and agreed upon by all members. Useful, collaborative work has been impaired somewhat by the uncertainty surrounding the leadership but the primary emphasis of the period 2023-2025 on sharing information between countries regarding work on geographical names has led to cross-border support and the sharing of expertise in a number of areas.

## 4. Dissemination work relating to geographical names

### 4.1 Official guidelines

Division members have been active in publishing official guidelines on geographical names and bringing these publications to the attention of the Division. Most notably, these include:

- **Denmark:** in November 2024, the Danish Language Council published a new edition of *Retskrivningsordbogen*, the Danish Dictionary of Standardized Spelling, including a selection of Danish place names. The secretariat of the Danish Place Name Committee served as a consultant by setting criteria for which place-names should be included ([https://ro.dsn.dk/?type=keyword&soeg\\_i=fullforms](https://ro.dsn.dk/?type=keyword&soeg_i=fullforms)).
- **Finland:** the online manual for guidance on names planning, *Hyvän nimistön opas/Namnplaneringsguiden*, was published in December 2023 (<https://kielitoimistonohjepankki.fi/hyvan-nimiston-opas/>).
- **Norway:** North Sámi toponymic guidelines were published in 2023 (online in North Sámi and Norwegian, <https://sametinget.no/f/p1/i31c19c16-7497-4cdc-bd42-0ecd6f658871/utfyllende-regler-for-skrivematen-av-nordsamiske-stedsnavn.pdf>); work on South Sámi toponymic guidelines is on hold. Guidelines for Kven geographical names were approved by the Ministry of Culture and Equality in August 2024 (online here <https://sprakradet.no/stedsnavn-og-navn-pa-statsorgan/lov-om-stadnamn-rettledning/utfyllende-reglar-om-skrivematen-av-kvenske-stadnamn/>).
- **Sweden:** the 14th version of the *Utrikes namnbok* (Foreign Name Book) was published in April 2024 (<https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2024/04/utrikes-namnbok/>).

## 4.2 *UNGEKN Bulletin*

Norden Division members published articles in volume 66 of the *UNGEKN Bulletin* (December 2023, ‘Geographical names supporting the international decade of indigenous languages’):

- “Norway: Navigating the Indigenous toponymic terrain”
- “Norway: Researching and promoting Sámi geographical names”

And in Volume 68 (December 2024, ‘The role of geographical names in preserving cultural heritage’):

- “Re-use of historical field-names”, Denmark
- “Geographical names and cultural heritage in Iceland: Current work and future challenges”, Iceland
- “The Geographical Names Portal Stadnamnportalen”, Norway
- “Artificial Intelligence in Evidence-Based Standardization of Historical Geographical Names: A Norwegian Case Study”, Norway.

## 4.3 *Norden Division News*

*Norden Division News* is a new initiative suggested and proposed by the outgoing Chair (Iceland). Currently being trialled, *Norden Division News* is conceived of as a small-scale biannual Division newsletter. The audience is first and foremost Division members and it is circulated via email (although it could also be made available online to others interested). The publication is primarily intended as a platform to record news and developments that have typically been reported on orally at Division meetings. It is also a way of advertising deadlines and other upcoming events that might be of interest to Division members. The first issue was circulated in January 2025 and had a positive reception. The newsletter accompanies this report as an appendix.

## 4.4 Participation and organisation of public-facing events

Members of the Division participated in and took part in organising a number of events concerning issues relating to the standardisation of geographical names in 2023-2025, amongst them:

- A workshop organised by the UNESCO-UNIGE Chair on Inclusive Toponymy (Geneva, April 2023)
- **27th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences** (Helsinki, August 2024, <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/28th-international-congress-onomastic-sciences>)
- **Nordic Cooperative Committee for Onomastic Research (NORNA) Symposium** on “Namn och konflikter” (Uppsala, November 2024) <https://www.isof.se/norna2023>

## 5. Reports and Working Papers submitted by Norden Division members to UNGEKN for consideration at the 2025 Session

*Division Report* (Agenda Item 4b)

- Report of the Norden Division, GEGN.2/2025/57/CRP.57

*Country reports* (Agenda Item 4a)

- Report of Denmark, GEGN.2/2025/35/CRP.35
- Report of Finland, GEGN.2/2025/79/CRP.79
- Report of Greenland GEGN.2/2025/102/CRP.102
- Report of Iceland, GEGN.2/2025/90/CRP.90
- Report of Norway, GEGN.2/2025/77/CRP.77
- Report of Sweden, GEGN.2/2025/91/CRP.91

*Other reports and working papers prepared and submitted by Norden Division Members*

- GEGN.2/2025/6/CRP.6. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Evidence-Based Geographical Names Management.
- GEGN.2/2025/7/CRP.7. The Dynamic Interplay of Use, Meaning, and Origin in Geographical Names Standardization.
- GEGN.2/2025/8/CRP.8. The Norwegian Geographical Names Portal, Stadnamnportalen: Technical Infrastructure Supporting Evidence-Based Geographical Names Standardization.
- GEGN.2/2025/9/CRP.9. Example laws on geographical names standardization and cultural heritage protection.
- GEGN.2/2025/11/CRP.11. Recommendations for constructing an inclusive and sustainable geographical names authority.
- GEGN.2/2025/12/CRP.12. Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors for International Use, Norway. Revised Edition 2025.
- GEGN.2/2025/13/CRP.13. Addressing Culturally and Socially Sensitive Geographical Names: A Framework for Standardization.
- GEGN.2/2025/14/CRP.14. Report of the Working Group on Funding and Training Courses in Toponymy.
- GEGN.2/2025/31/CRP.31. Report of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage
- GEGN.2/2025/60/CRP.60. Documentary evidence in geographical names management: pitfalls of circular reference and institutional self-documentation.
- GEGN.2/2025/153/CRP.153 Training Needs Assessment for Geographical Names Management: Survey Results Report.