



Update on UNGEGN activities
Presented to the UN-GGIM Virtual Meeting of its Expanded Bureau
Thursday 11 March 2021

1. For nearly 60 years, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) has been promoting the recording of locally-used names reflecting the languages and traditions of a country. The Group's goal is for every country to have a fully functioning and globally-aligned structure and policy framework, based on common principles for national standardization of geographical names that identify location and respect the associated culture and heritage, and to have these names easily accessible for national and international use. UNGEGN's cooperative framework consisting of its Bureau, 24 geographical/linguistic divisions, nine topical working groups and liaison representatives, promotes geographical names standardization through its resolutions, sessions, technical seminars, publications, website and training activities.

2021 UNGEGN Session

2. Preparations are underway for convening the [2021/second session from 3-7 May 2021](#). As was the case for the tenth session of UN-GGIM and the recently concluded 52nd session of the Statistical Commission, the 2021 UNGEGN session will be conducted virtually and informally with two, two-hour sessions daily (9 -11 a.m. and 3-5 p.m. EDT). The session will address the theme "*Geographical Names Supporting Sustainable Development and Management of the Pandemic*", which supports General Assembly resolution 70/1, which called for ECOSOC inter-governmental bodies and forums to reflect the integrated nature of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as well as the interlinkages between them.

3. The Group of Experts has a robust work programme with 11 substantive work items, see the [provisional agenda for 2021](#). The following are some major topics to be addressed during the session: a) the 2021 - 2029 Strategic Plan and Work Programme, b) place names supporting sustainable development, c) toponymic data files and gazetteers, d) romanization systems, and e) geographical names as cultural heritage.

4. UN-GGIM members are invited to participate in the upcoming session via [UN Live United Nations Web TV](#), given that the virtual session gives a wide cross section of experts the opportunity to learn more about UNGEGN, its work and the importance of geographical names standardization in all our lives.

Weaknesses and Threats

5. The Group of Experts in its effort to chart a way forward reviewed its weakness and threats, as these issues served to help to guide the preparation of the draft strategic plan and programme of work. The following weaknesses were identified: i) work on standardization and on romanization is not well known and understood by others in related disciplines; ii) lack of resources to assist Member States that have low levels of geographical names standardization; iii) continued political issues in sessions and an unreliable coping mechanism; iv) lack of funding for participation at UNGEGN sessions and associated activities; and v) inconsistent engagement with bodies and organizations that deals with global geographical names. The threats are as follows: i) unauthoritative geographical names data that are more



easily sourced are used by governments and the public; ii) standardized geographical naming good practices are not upheld by Member States; iii) failure to maintain UNGEGN's strategic direction may in the long-term result in possible UN-GGIM dominance; iv) financial and pandemic restrictions impede in-person sessions, capacity building and regional/thematic activities and iv) loss of expertise of long-serving members.

Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029

6. A major work item emanating from the first session of the “new” UNGEGN is the preparation of its draft strategic plan and programme of work. The Bureau and its working group chairs have prepared the draft plan and programme of work which is currently out on its third round of global consultation. The document presents the vision, values and aims of UNGEGN, together with five strategies and their collective alignment to the relevant goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The five strategies are: 1) technical expertise, 2) relationships, links and connections, 3) effective work programmes, 4) culture, heritage and language recognition, and 5) promotion and capacity building. For each strategy, the main achievements, current status and future needs are provided, followed by the presentation of the Programme of Work responsibilities, outputs and timeframes up to 2029. Additional information on the strategic plan including the draft document are available on the group's website [UNSD – United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names](#). The draft strategic plan and programme of work will be presented at the Group of Experts 2021 session in May for acceptance.

Collaboration with the UN-GGIM

7. We wish to bring to the Expanded Bureau's attention decision 10/112 from the Group of Experts tenth session which supported the establishment of a liaison group between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts to act as a guiding mechanism to manage the flow of information between the two bodies and to continue to identify areas of joint work, and which welcomed the proposal to convene a joint meeting of the Bureau of the Committee and the Bureau of the Group in early 2021. The Group of Experts look forward to recognizing UN-GGIM members to the liaison group and agreeing on a mutually convenient date for the joint meeting between the Bureaux.

8. The Group of Experts is pleased to be supporting the CARIGEO initiative and is committed to convening a webinar for member states and territories within the Caribbean on geographical names standardization, in late June 2021.

Contributing to the work of ECOSOC

9. One responsibility as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, is to ensure the harmonization and coordination of UNGEGN's agendas and work programmes with that of its parent. In this regard, the Chair of UNGEGN participated in the annual meeting of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council with the Chairs of the ECOSOC Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies on 1 February 2021. The Group of Experts will also be providing input to the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF); the forum will be discussing in dept some key Sustainable Development Goals such as no poverty, reduced inequalities, and partnerships.