

Report of UN-GGIM to 2022 Session of ECOSOC: Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management

Strategic Policy Brief

"Your dedication, expertise and guidance – in geospatial data, methods, frameworks, tools, and platforms – is urgently needed. The data needs for the SDGs are great, and time is not on our side. Reliable, timely, accessible and disaggregated geospatial information must be brought to bear to measure progress, inform decision-making and ensure effective and inclusive national and sub-national programs that will chart the path towards the 'Geospatial Way to a Better World', to assist in the implementation of the SDGs, and transform our world for the better."

António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress
19 November 2018

Context

in 2016 the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) requested that the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) reports back to the Council, no later than in five years' time, on the implementation of Resolution [2016/27](#), as well as to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of UN-GGIM. The upcoming review and examination of the UN-GGIM's institutional arrangements will be of significant importance for the future working methods of the Committee of Experts.

This Strategic Policy Brief serves as a foundation document to use and build upon as a source of inspiration and a tool for the global UN-GGIM community to reach out, engage, and maintain contact with stakeholders, especially key ministries and Permanent Missions to the United Nations. The objective is to inform and communicate the strategic importance and relevance of a strong international (UN) geospatial community, while generating understanding of UN-GGIM to non-geospatial decision makers. This Policy Brief consists of two parts. Part 1 comprises key messages to the world. In omitting the usual geospatial-related technical language, this part can help to connect with stakeholders and decision-makers alike, introducing them to the world of geospatial information and providing insights into the tangible value and benefit of geospatial information for society. Part 2 focuses on the objectives of UN-GGIM and the next steps to continue and ensure our increasing contribution to Member States and the global geospatial community. By using the same document/key messages, we can encourage uniform messaging. Of course, delegates are encouraged to include and use their own national examples and preferences that are suitable to emphasize the added value of UN-GGIM.

Part 1: Key Messages

Informed decision-making – For the benefit of all

Let's face it, our world where we live, work, and play faces many challenges. Expanding urbanization, concerns about food production, climate change, the need for sustainable land management and development, and growing inequality are putting our global 'resilience' under stress. The COVID-19

pandemic has ignited a wake-up call and is continuing, increasing the need for worldwide collaboration and cooperation. We also see a world that offers us new possibilities, opportunities, and hope. Technology and innovation offer new tools and means to make a positive impact. Humanity has proven to be resilient and new leaders in different disciplines are providing us with a path forward.

Challenges and opportunities are two sides of the same coin. A coin that can flip easily from one side to the other. It is our moral obligation as humans in a world society to work closely together, facing these challenges and seizing opportunities. Challenges are complex, they do not care about frontiers. Rising sea levels will affect all nations, if not directly then through our interconnected economies. Opportunities in tackling these challenges go beyond frontiers and borders. In working together, technology and innovation are our allies in ensuring human resilience.

Of course, you as a representative of your country, your agency, or an organisation focusing on the development of a country, region, continent, understand this. It is not new, and you will do everything that is possible in your position by seeking alliances, investing in development, innovation, risk reduction, educating new generations to stay focussed, plant and harvest. You are an influencer, a decision-maker. You know too well that time is essential, that resources are scarce, that rules may be limiting, finances are tight, information is dynamic, and knowledge – and trust in that knowledge – is essential.

Your seat, the front seat

Being in the front seat requires decisions, your decisions, to be informed and based on the best and most reliable data available to derive trusted information and knowledge. And we can help. Sometimes information is already there; it is like the dashboard in your car. You see the digits, you hear the beeping alarm in case your seatbelt is not fastened, your wheel nudges you to go back in line, your navigator is your ally to turn left. Informed decision-making!

However, this does not apply only to cars, sitting in the driver's seat relates to your discipline, be it climate adaptation, efficient energy sources, resilient supply chains, sustainable health, food security, human rights, technology development, just to name a few. All these crucial fields of attention have a common key element; location. Indeed, everything happens somewhere, and location now underpins everything we do. **Knowing location – what is happening where – is then knowing what action to take, and when.** And we can help with geospatial information!

What is geospatial information

Geospatial information provides the integrative data and technology platform for all digital data that has a 'location' dimension and describes the physical location of geographic features and their relationship to other features and associated statistical information. Geospatial information provides the digital version of our world and is a nation's 'digital currency' for evidence-based decision-making. It is a critical component of a national infrastructure and knowledge economy that provides a nation's blueprint of what happens where, and the means to integrate a wide variety of government services that contribute to economic growth, national security, sustainable social development, environmental sustainability and national prosperity.

Who are we?

Established by ECOSOC in July 2011, and represented by national experts in all Member States, UN-GGIM is the peak intergovernmental body that makes joint decisions and sets directions on the use of geospatial

information within national, regional and global policy frameworks. These include developing effective strategies to build geospatial capacity in developing countries, and to ensure that accurate, reliable, and authoritative geospatial information is readily available to support national, regional and global development. UN-GGIM celebrated its first milestone in 2016, with geospatial information management in Member States strengthened through global methods, guides, understanding and action. Encouraged to move forward in its development journey by ECOSOC, and now five years later, we witness that our world has changed significantly. The relevance of location and geospatial information has become even more pressing and immediate. The prevailing question, what is happening when, where, why and how? On a daily basis, we need to know, we need to have the right information about what is happening where.

The integration of location-based information with other data of relevance to our lives is key to providing better, and useful information towards shared understandings, which in turn will enable us to better achieve local, national and international goals, including the SDGs and our climate agenda. **UN-GGIM combines the experiences of the global geospatial community** by uniting the knowledge and experiences of countries' representatives, governments, industry, the private sector, and the academic world. Focusing on the integrated key element of location. A solid basis for your decisions. A solid basis for your informed decisions affecting the environmental, economic, and social domains.

What do we have to offer?

By integrating geospatial information and location data with relevant information on societal and landscape changes, we can support your insights today and into the future. **Establishing a sound basis for understanding what is happening when, where, why, and how this is affecting specific communities.**

As a unique worldwide geospatial community we have built steadily on experiences and connections. Our joint efforts over the years have resulted in a solid intergovernmental architecture and geospatial blueprint. A blueprint that focuses on the integration of different key aspects of location related, geospatial information. Providing in fact the glue between people, land and place. We designed this blueprint to fit the needs of every country, supporting a tailor made and flexible approach enabling countries to tune their priorities with the key elements of the geospatial blueprint and national needs.

As a world community we know that economic, social, and environmental challenges don't stop at borders. Therefore, the establishment of UN-GGIM enabled us to work together and **create the UN-GGIM community. Across borders. A joint global knowledge base on the relevance and difference geospatial information can make.** Connecting different sectors, like National Geospatial, National Mapping, and National Cadastre Agencies, and with National Statistical Offices, international geospatial societies, the geospatial industry and private sector, the academic and research sector, and the United Nations system; all of which are still growing. And in cooperation. Talking the same language while learning to move these borders towards different disciplines. We are good sector integrators.

We too have a moral obligation as human participants in a world society to cooperate. Supporting our international, national, and local challenges and goals, be it environmental, economic or social. And quite critical to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yes, indeed, by taking the SDGs as global, regional and country related milestones, the time remaining towards their achievement in 2030 is short. **Informed decision-making is essential, and the relevance (and realisation) of geospatial information continues to grow.** UN-GGIM can support in achieving these goals. **We are a unique global technical community, of which its purpose has grown in importance.**

We can talk about the essence of geospatial information: its data, specifications, standards, methods and frameworks. We love to talk about our work, we are committed. But creating more data or frameworks is not our goal. These are only a means to an end. Data without intrinsic value is worth very little. Frameworks without practical use and implementation help nobody. By combining geospatial data with other data and providing user-friendly frameworks and interfaces, (geospatial) data becomes indispensable. Not for us, but for the world. Many challenges and opportunities require decisions, informed decisions. We can help you.

It might not be a surprise that the world-based focus of UN-bodies, its inseparable connection with the SDGs and the overall objective for a better world are substantial and are reflected in the ECOSOC Agenda. We have worked as a UN-GGIM Community at the UN level to promote the real added value of location-based information. **ECOSOC's challenges are also our challenges.** ECOSOC understands that “the potential benefits of new technologies must be made available to all, taking into account the needs of the more vulnerable people. Investing in timely, reliable and disaggregated data and statistics, as well as **geospatial information, is critical** to monitor the pandemic, but also to leaving no one behind, achieving the SDGs and building foresight and resilience to risks and future shocks.” Informed decision-making! Today, but especially into the future, time is of the essence and waste of it is no longer permitted. We can deliver the glue between location and people; for the benefit of all: ‘Everything happens somewhere.’ Place is food, place is home, place is CO2 reduction. Place is everywhere. And everything.

Our global community

UN-GGIM has united many countries and experts ‘geospatially’ worldwide during the last 10 years. A steadily growing community that is being seen as the apex global geospatial expertise, first consisting of geospatial experts, later expanding as a community with industry and sector stakeholders from other communities; users of location information and still growing. The words ‘still growing’ equate to developing, reaching more countries, more sectors, more users, and more communities. Empowering your communities. Located on all continents across the globe, we can support the outreach, and objectives, be they economic, social, environmental of all communities. Insights and overview. Integrated and neutral. Supporting your decisions. Now and into the future.

A structure is established, activities are embedded and ongoing, results are being delivered, the community is growing. UN-GGIM has embraced ECOSOC’s guidance and mandates with demonstrable positive accomplishments in both the global geospatial landscape and in national development programs as best as it can given the present resources and ‘cost neutral’ requirements. However, in order to secure the level of committed contribution towards your challenges of tomorrow we are convinced of the need for the strengthening of our structure and our institutional arrangements. And therefore, opt for moving forward; from a trusted Committee to a functional Commission, using the additional capacity and funding for development, strengthening and speeding up knowledge and decision-making.

We can deliver relevant data, methods, frameworks, sound, neutral and proven, and provide the necessary and desperately needed capacity building tools. Our toolbox is amply filled, and ready to use. You know, we are not geospatial specialists, we are your builders that glue the pieces together. Providing you with a sound basis for informed decision-making. For the benefit of all!

Part 2: UN-GGIM factsheet (A more factual approach)

Laying the groundwork for a world connected by data, for informed decisions by people

What is the value of geospatial information?

Geospatial information is more than maps, it also comprises the key data and information for location- and evidence-based decision-making. It is a critical component of a national infrastructure and knowledge economy that provides a nation's blueprint of what happens where, and the means to integrate a wide variety of government services that contribute to economic growth, national security, sustainable social development, environmental sustainability and national prosperity. Geospatial data is important in relation to many global problems and global goals. It is required and used continuously by all countries, types of organizations, and citizens.

Earth (geospatial) information needs an infrastructure that no one sees, but which is crucial for our world. With new technologies and innovation, and wider use of existing technologies, the amount of geospatial data is growing rapidly. Modern world problems, like climate change, can only be tackled internationally, and for that, the world needs a common and trustful foundation of information. Geospatial information, and therefore UN-GGIM, can provide this infrastructure, on which the UN and the world can rely. It enables us to compare over time, to learn from past failures and successes, and to monitor progress. You can only manage if you can measure.

Why connecting data?

Geospatial information can be an accelerator for change, it is transformational. By connecting geospatial information with other data sources, new insights are quickly obtained. Geospatial information can be connected with all kinds of data (e.g. health, transportation, education, security, climate, agriculture, pandemic, etc). Because of its location elements, geospatial information is the 'integrator' and glue for all other data. With the amount of, and the demand for, data growing, we need to make sure that our geospatial data infrastructure worldwide remains strong and capable to match the needs of our modern times. This empowers us to make informed decisions and positively influence our living environment.

What has been achieved so far?

Established in 2011, UN-GGIM has been a fast-growing global community. In 2016, the mandate of UN-GGIM was strengthened and broadened by ECOSOC. However, no resources were made available to deliver this mandate. Nonetheless, UN-GGIM has grown consistently and can report several milestones. The UN-GGIM resolution for a Global Geodetic Reference Frame for Sustainable Development (GGRF) – adopted by the UN General Assembly on 26 February 2015 – is a significant success for UN-GGIM. This resolution is the first geoscience-related resolution of the General Assembly. Furthermore, UN-GGIM has so far drawn up and adopted several global policy papers (or 'frameworks'), such as the 'Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF)' that serve as a superordinate framework for developing countries in particular, to set up efficient geospatial data management systems, and to make authoritative geospatial data of high quality accessible and available.

Moreover, UN-GGIM is also establishing two United Nations Centre's of Excellence. The Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence in the UN campus in Bonn, Germany, will coordinate global alignment and cooperation across Member States and stakeholders to strengthen the Global Geodetic Reference Frame and related geodetic data and infrastructure. The Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre, in

Deqing, China, will build capacity for Member States to promote and support the required innovation, leadership, coordination and standards to deliver national geospatial information policy, data, systems, tools, services and capabilities into their national government development policies, strategies and arrangements.

What is missing?

UN-GGIM presently operates with a limited structure and is under-resourced. Yet, we are an active and global community that is keen on helping each other, at whatever location. Therefore, we will ask to restructure UN-GGIM into a functional commission under ECOSOC. With improved financial means, UN-GGIM can maintain a much-needed and mandated program of work with a dedicated secretariat to connect, coordinate and grow our global community. Moreover, we can help more communities worldwide with projects, expertise, and implementing proven geospatial frameworks, technology solutions and geodetic systems. Geospatial information enables us to fill the blank spots on the map, both literally and proverbially. By increasing our range of action, we can truly connect the world.

Capacity building is necessary to strengthen interaction with the Statistical Commission and other relevant UN bodies. In this way, UN-GGIM can invest in innovation and support experts and projects at a global level to close the growing geospatial digital divide between certain Member States. Both within the UN as well as worldwide, UN-GGIM can kickstart cooperation and innovative decision-making. More than 80 percent of all decisions have a geospatial component to them, but until now very recently limited attention has been given to the role of location.

What we need?

ECOSOC's Resolution [2016/27](#) emphasized the important broadening and strengthening of the mandates of UN-GGIM but requested that this must be in a 'cost-neutral' manner and without any meeting entitlements. UN-GGIM was provided with a strengthened mandates, but with no resources to implement the mandates. Mandates are not an issue, it is UN-GGIM's ability to deliver on the mandates which is to be improved.

No other entity of the UN system (program, fund, or Specialized Agency) has taken over the role to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in geospatial capacity-building, geospatial norm-setting, geospatial data collection, geospatial data dissemination and geospatial data sharing, among others, especially in developing Member States. This must be improved for UN-GGIM.

What we ask?

Our proposal consists of strengthening UN-GGIM's structure and its financial resources:

1. The elevation of the current structure of the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts to a 'Functional Commission' under ECOSOC (in a similar manner as the Statistical Commission) to better support its political and strategical importance; and
2. The request for regular budget resources to fund activities for an efficient global geospatial information management program and including dedicated Secretariat staff resources, numbers of which would need to be justified and negotiated.

If UN-GGIM were to obtain these changed structures and resources, it could respond more efficiently and effectively to the urgent needs of the 2030 Agenda and the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, the Sendai Framework, climate change, as well as to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- increasing capacity-building in the key areas of our work such as fundamental data needs through a wider pool of available resources;
- investing better into innovation and emerging geospatial technologies;
- integrating more across the UN system as a Functional Commission, strengthening responsibilities and the interaction with the Statistical Commission and other subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC;
- closing the geospatial digital divide and have greater Member State engagement through a more efficient management and dedicated responsibilities; and
- supporting experts from developing countries, to leave no one behind.

