



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



Update on the UNGEGN World Geographic Names Database

16 April 2024

UN/LOCODE Advisory Group Meeting 2024

Cecille Blake

UNDESA, UN Statistics Division

Global Geospatial Information Management Section

UNGEGN Secretariat

Content

- **UNGEGN's mandate and role**
- **The UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database**
- **Features of the UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database**
- **The creation of a unique identifier for cities**

UNGEGN- United Nations Group Of Experts On Geographical Names

- A subsidiary body of ECOSOC
- Promotes standardization of geographical names in response to national requirements
- Creates and follows-up on the implementation of resolutions
- Provides a forum for discussion – geographers, linguists, administrators, GIS specialists, cartographers ...
- Supported by a Secretariat at UNHQ (NY)
- Creates working groups and task teams to focus on specific areas of current concern and interest
- Has 24 geographical/linguistic divisions for grassroots work



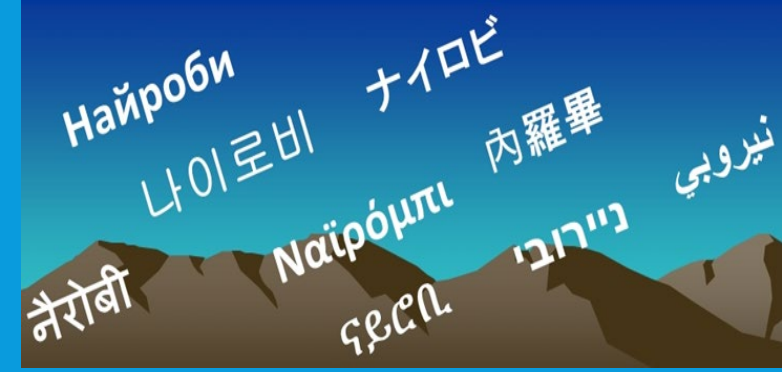
What UNGEGN is NOT

- Decision maker on feature names
- Arbitrator of disputes over names
- Place to air political issues, even if they are related in some way to place names
- Decision maker on what processes, legislation or policy is correct for any country



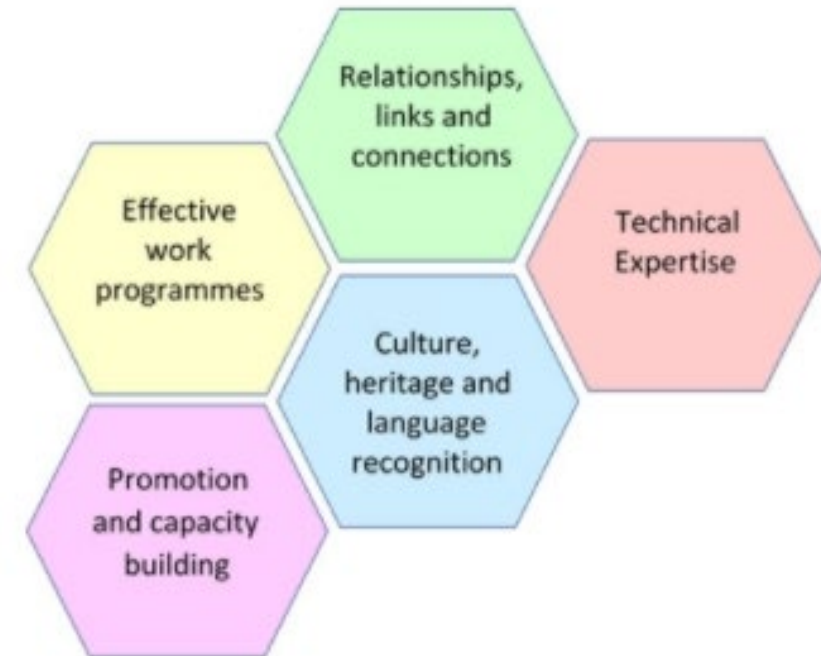
UNGEGN's aims

- Encourage the creation of national names authorities
 - backed by legislation
 - respect local usage of names
 - collect, store and disseminate authorized names - for government and public use
- Raise awareness of the value and benefits of geographical names standardization
- Recognize the value of geographical names both to identify place and as elements of cultural heritage
- Develop single scientifically-based systems of romanization
- Contribute to work of UN bodies and collaborate with non-UN organizations



EVOLUTION OF UNGEGN – RECENT HISTORY

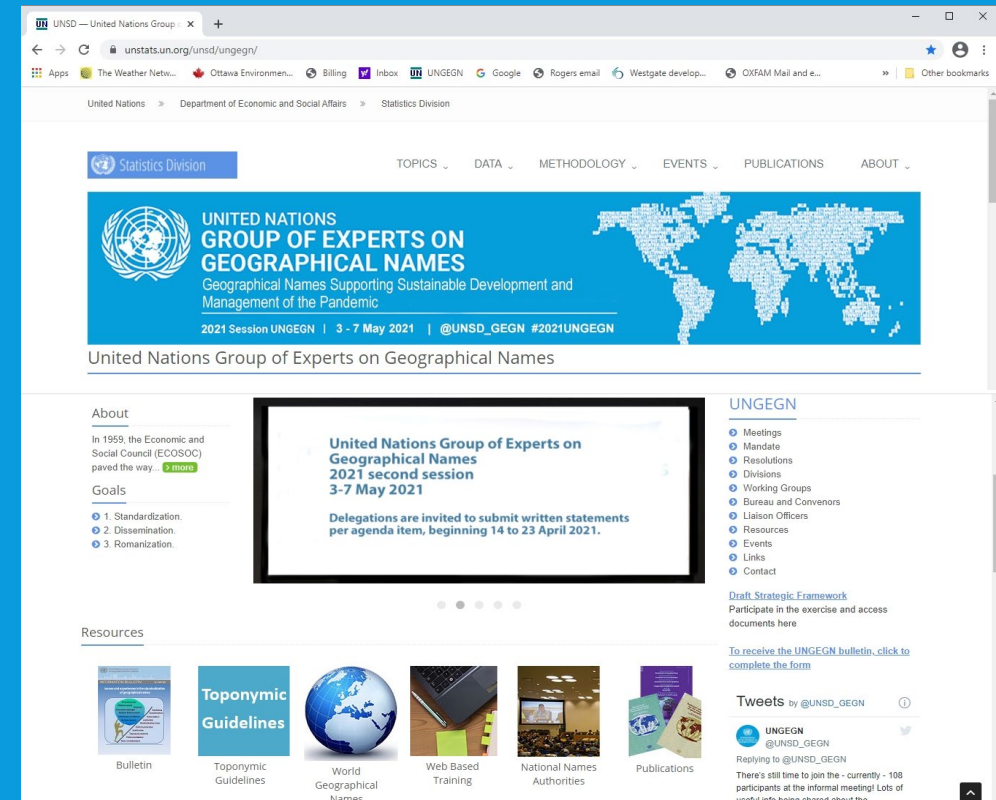
- **1967 – Created**
- **2017 – Reorganization to “new” UNGEGN**
 - Session convened every 2 years starting in 2019
- **2019 – Creation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan**
 - Including Programme of Work
 - Document (CRP.94) approved
- **2021 – After approval of Strategic Plan**
 - Member States invited to become involved in the implementation of the Programme of Work
- **2023 – Last session held**
 - See report E/2023/84



UNGEGN WEBSITE

<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/>

- Last redesign was in 2019
- **Very large reference source**
 - UNGEGN Bulletin
 - Manuals, media kit, pamphlets
-  **World Geographical Names Database**
- National authorities
- Documents from conferences/sessions
- Resolutions/recommendations
- Web-based training
- Events, Links, Tweets, and more



The screenshot shows the homepage of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The page features a blue header with the UN logo and the text "UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES". Below the header, there is a navigation menu with options like "TOPICS", "DATA", "METHODOLOGY", "EVENTS", "PUBLICATIONS", and "ABOUT". A central banner highlights the "2021 Session UNGEGN | 3 - 7 May 2021" and includes a call to action: "Delegations are invited to submit written statements per agenda item, beginning 14 to 23 April 2021." The page also includes sections for "About", "Goals", "Resources", and "UNGEGN" with various links and social media information.

UNGEEN WORLD GEOGRAPHIC NAMES (WGN) DATABASE

- Provides governments and the public at large **access to an authoritative global repository of standardized geographical names** of countries cities, indigenous places and geographical features of interest to support research, decision making and relevant applications.
- **Collects, manages and disseminates authoritative geographical names data** - country name, capital city names and major city names.
- provides responses to toponymic questions
- provides the opportunity for countries to make available the standardized forms of their city names for use in a global context.



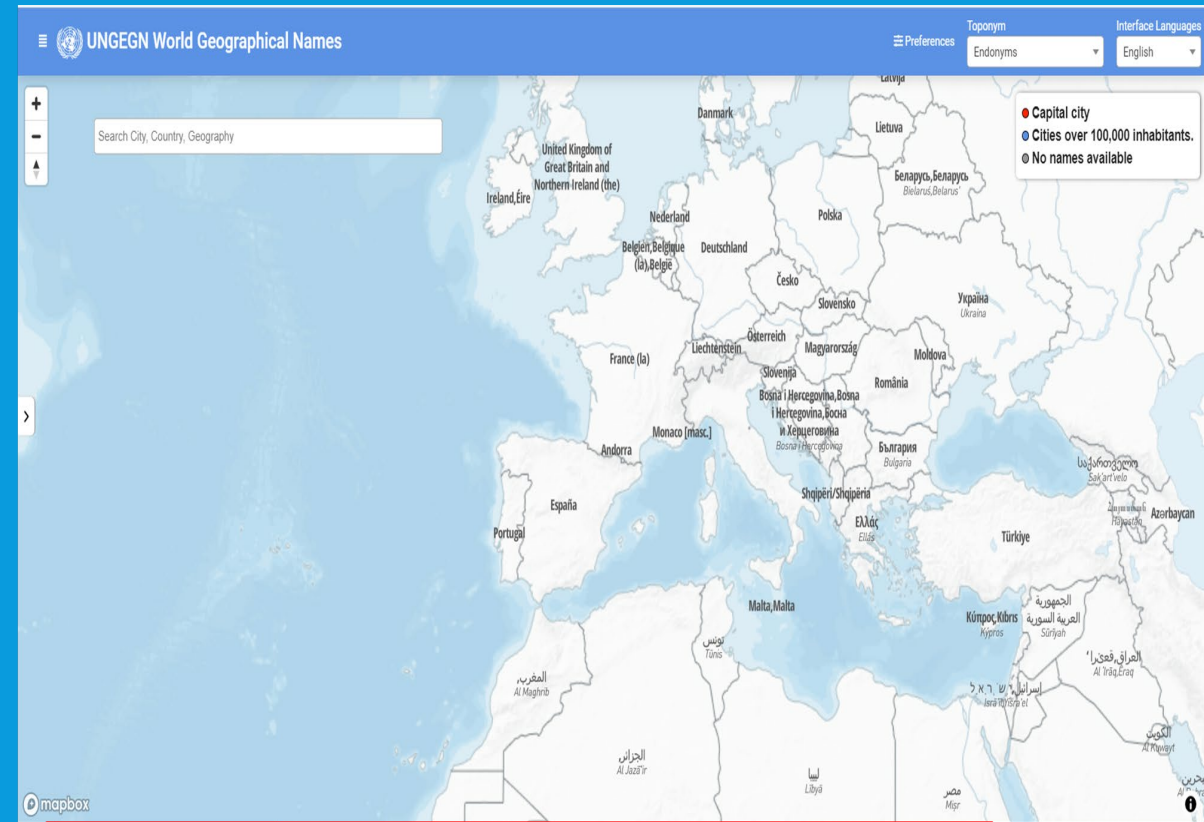
UNGEGN World Geographical Names

Multilingual, multiscriptual dataset of names of countries, capitals and major cities.

Geographical Names Database | About | FAQ | Feedback | Contact

A key UNGEGN Resource

- A multilingual, multi-scriptual geo-referenced database containing names of UN member states (country names), capitals, and cities/towns with a population over 100,000 and related audio pronunciation files.
- All entries provide endonyms, and forms used by the United Nations in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish for the countries and capitals.



The Basemap is provided by the UN OICT from their “UN Clear Map” product.
The basemap is provided without labels

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the)

Endonyms

Language	Short Name	Formal Name	Info
English	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the)	the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Info

United Nations Languages

Language	Short Name	Formal Name	Info
Arabic	المملكة المتحدة لبريطانيا العظمى وأيرلندا الشمالية	المملكة المتحدة لبريطانيا العظمى وأيرلندا الشمالية	Info
Chinese	大不列颠及北爱尔兰联合王国	大不列颠及北爱尔兰联合王国	Info
French	Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord (le)	le Royaume-Uni (de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord)	Info
Russian	Соединенное Королевство Великобритании и Северной Ирландии	Соединенное Королевство Великобритании и Северной Ирландии	Info
Spanish	Reino Unido de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda del Norte (el)	el Reino Unido (de Gran Bretaña e Irlanda del Norte)	Info

Cities

✓ London (Capital City)	Lat: 51.5842514368 Long: -0.13075498882
✓	Lat: 49.4696464615 Long: -2.55097197725
✓	Lat: 49.1890449298 Long: -2.11032098454
✓ Aberdeen	Lat: 57.13333333 Long: -2.1
✓ Belfast	Lat: 54.58333333 Long: -5.933333333
✓ Birmingham	Lat: 52.46666667 Long: -1.916666667

Search City, Country, Geography

- Capital city
- Cities over 100,000 inhabitants.
- No names available

Toponyms captured for all countries and capital cities in the six UN official languages

City data provided by Member States and other authoritative sources covering 100+ Languages, including non-romanised languages



1

WGN Public Dashboard

Web-based interface

- Zoom and pan
- Click identify and retrieve data

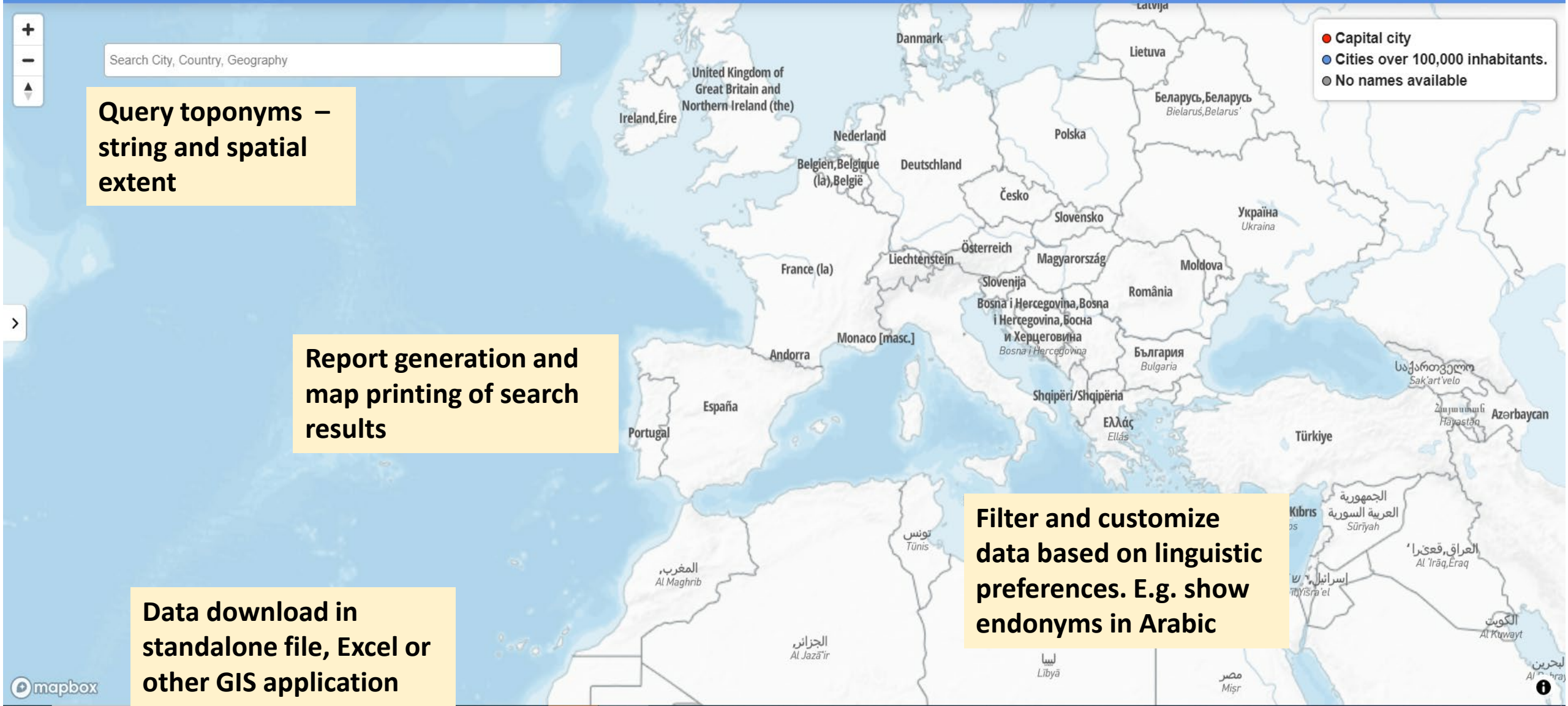
Query toponyms – string and spatial extent

Report generation and map printing of search results

Data download in standalone file, Excel or other GIS application

Filter and customize data based on linguistic preferences. E.g. show endonyms in Arabic

- Capital city
- Cities over 100,000 inhabitants.
- No names available





Possible queries

1. What are the short and long names for capitals of a selected country, UN region, UNGEGN Division, (graphical fence, text search)?
2. List and show countries with national names authorities?
3. Which is/are the correct endonym(s) of the country/the city?
4. How is the name pronounced?
5. What was the old or historic name of the country/city?
6. Which are the exonyms for the country and or capital?
7. Where is the place and what are the coordinates?
8. For Languages: what are the ISO-codes (ISO 639-1 or ISO 639-2 Codes?)
9. Display map and list all countries that have had name changes in the past/since/between (X) years.
10. Display map and list all countries with active geographical names authorities

Country Details- Bosnia and Herzegovina

M49 Code	Continent
70	5 Europe
ISO2	Region
BA	16 Southern Europe
ISO3	First Official Language
BIH	SKOS URI
ISO Standard	Visualization Order
ISO 3166-1 alpha-3	
Display	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
UN Member	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Historical Progression

Event D800 : State Seceded From	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia	<input type="checkbox"/> Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Event D70 : State Seceded To	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina

FootNotes

Toponyms (Since 23-Nov-2021 - 08-Mar-2022)

Language	Short Name	Formal Name	Source
Bosnian	Bosna i Hercegovina	Bosna i Hercegovina	UNEGN Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names
Croatian	Bosna i Hercegovina	Bosna i Hercegovina	UNEGN Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names
Serbian	Босна и Херцеговина Bosna i Hercegovina	Босна и Херцеговина Bosna i Hercegovina	UNEGN Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names

United Nations Languages

Language	Short Name	Formal Name	Source
Arabic	البوسنة والهرسك	البوسنة والهرسك	UN terms
Chinese	波斯尼亚和黑塞哥维那	波斯尼亚和黑塞哥维那	UN terms
English	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina	UN terms
French	Bosnie-Herzégovine (la)	la Bosnie-Herzégovine	UN terms
Russian	Босния и Герцеговина	Босния и Герцеговина	UN terms
Spanish	Bosnia y Herzegovina	Bosnia y Herzegovina	UN terms



New administration function allows for effective management and maintenance of the database.

- entering and editing geographic names data
- data validation and formatting
- version control for data integrity and audit
- Management of user accounts and permissions**



Feature Improvements

- Database design allows for the **geography data type** that allows adding other toponymic features such as indigenous names and marine areas.
- The **temporal dimension of toponyms** is now included. This functionality enables the cataloguing of toponymic changes to geographies over time. For example, the Kingdom of Eswatini changed its name from “Kingdom of Swaziland in 2018, both names will be reflected in the database.

Data Governance

- The Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management, provides oversight for the WGN Database
- The UN Statistics Division hosts the database and is responsible for its technical development and maintenance

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS- creation of a unique identifier for cities

- The Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management has prepared a paper DRAFT Position Paper on the development of a global unique identifier for cities in fulfillment of Recommendation 2 of UNGEGN's 2023 Session.
- **UNGEGN Data Cleaning and update**
 - Member States
 - Request review of existing geographic names held within the WGN database
 - Request input (in defined format) of new geographical names
 - Interlinkages with national geographical names authorities and identify national focal point(s)
- **Integration across Authoritative Data from the UN System**
 - Short Term
 - UN Demographic Yearbook – Authoritative Member State provided statistical data and UNTERM
 - Long Term
 - UN Gazette


Concept Note --- DRAFT Position Paper on the development of a global unique identifier for cities

Summary

- This paper provides concepts for the creation of a unique identifier for cities and identifies URIs and/or UUIDs as suitable mechanisms for their creation.
- The paper has been circulated and is being discussed by UNGEGN experts and the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information.

Chapter 4 - Universal and Unique Identifier management considerations

- Using Uniform Resource Identifiers “URIs” as global resource identifiers
- Using Universal Unique Identifiers “UUIDs”
- Assumptions for the globally unique identifiers (either URIs or UUIDs) of the WGN DB



UNEGN World Geographical Names Database

DRAFT Position Paper on the development of a global unique identifier for cities
By the UNGEGN Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management

Paper Structure

1. Introduction 2

Timeline and Actions

#	Task/Action	Responsibility	Status
1	Discussion of ideas for a unique identifier for cities concept for the WGN DB with colleagues from DE (BKG) and NL (Dutch Kadaster)	Convenor WG GNDM	Done
2	DRAFT Position Paper on the development of a unique identifier for cities, version 0.1	Convenor WG GNDM	Done
3	Discussions about the WGN DB and the DRAFT Position Paper with UN SD / DESA and UNGEGN Bureau members, version 0.3	UN SD	Done
4	Exchange of the DRAFT Position Paper, version 0.4, with the WG GNDM	Convenor WG GNDM	Done
5	Update of the DRAFT Position Paper, version 0.5	Convenor WG GNDM	Done
6	Discussions about the WGN DB and the updated DRAFT Position Paper with UN SD / DESA and UNGEGN Expanded Bureau members, version 0.6-0.9	UN SD	Done
7	Circulate version 0.9 to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNGEGN WG GNDM --- for information • UNGEGN Expanded Bureau --- for information and discussion at its next meeting in February 2024 • Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information (EG ISGI) 	Convenor WG GNDM	January 2024 (most probably)
8	Endorsement of the Position Paper by the bodies mentioned under #7	Convenor WG GNDM	Q1/2024

Done
In progress
Delayed

The WG GNDM seeks the review and comment of relevant groups on the concepts outlined within this paper. Please contact Mr Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu (Pier-Giorgio.Zaccheddu@bkg.bund.de) and Mr Mark Iliffe (mark.iliffe@un.org) with your comments.