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English

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

2025 session

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda *

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



United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

National report of Iceland for the period 2023-2025



* GEGN.2/2025/1

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Iceland is a member of the Norden Division

National report		
A	Summary <i>A short summary, which describes main points of the national report. This part is also usually sent in a separate document before the national report.</i>	<p>The full report of Iceland will follow the new National report model template as closely as possible. Key points of information in the full report include items under the following headings:</p> <p>B: Member state report on the situation in their country.</p> <p>C: National and international meetings, conferences, symposiums, publicity and publications.</p> <p>D: Measures taken and proposed to implement UN resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, including the economic and social benefits.</p> <p>E: National standardization.</p> <p>F: Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity.</p> <p>H: Toponymic data files and gazetteers.</p>

B	<p>Member state report on the situation in their country</p> <p><i>The progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the last UNGEGN session (news in the field of geonames in the country, progress of ongoing projects, finished projects, issues and use cases for inspiration for other countries, changes in database of geonames).</i></p>	<p>Overall, progress in Iceland on the standardization of geographical names has been consistent since the last UNGEGN session in 2023.</p> <p>As reported for previous sessions, two government-funded bodies - Landmælingar Íslands/National Land Survey of Iceland (LMÍ, now NÁTT after infrastructural changes, see below), and Árnastofnun/The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies - work together formally on aspects of geographical name standardization, as laid out in Icelandic law (22/2015, Lög um örnefni, https://www.althingi.is/altext/pdf/144/s/1023.pdf and the current laws for each respective institution, https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2006040.html and https://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2024.054.html). NÁTT is responsible for maintaining and updating the Icelandic place-name database (örnefnagrunnur, https://ornefnasja.lmi.is/mapview/?application=ornefnasja); Árnastofnun advises NÁTT on the treatment of specific geographical names when issues arise (e.g. re. orthography, grammatical declension, or when multiple names exist for the same geographical feature or place).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An improved workflow between the two institutes (which hold an annual consultation meeting) is being implemented; discussion of matters addressed in connection with work on standardizing geographical names in the Icelandic place-name database is now published annually in the Icelandic journal <i>Orð og tunga</i> (see, e.g., https://doi.org/10.33112/ordogtungu.26.9); • By the end of 2024, the total geographical names in the Icelandic place-name database numbered 189,000. Every year, 10-15,000 names are added. Corrections and additions made in total number around 50,000. New data is published for download four times a year but updated on a weekly basis on the online map-viewer (örnefnasjá); • In 2024, LMÍ merged with two other institutes (the Mývatn Research Station and the Icelandic Institute of Natural History) to form Náttúrufræðistofnun/Natural Science Institute of Iceland, NÁTT (see https://www.naturufraedistofnun.is/). <p>As per the 2015 Place-name Act, Örnefnanefnd/The Icelandic Place-Name Committee of Iceland (https://www.arnastofnun.is/is/ornefnanefnd), handles matters brought to its attention and advises local authorities on matters relating to geographical names where necessary. A new committee was appointed in 2024 for the period 2024-2028, following a period of inactivity after the previous term came to an end. Annual reports for 2023 and 2024 are online at https://www.arnastofnun.is/is/arsskyrslur-ornefnanefndar. Matters dealt with include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of proposals sent in for the name of the new local authority formed in May 2024 when Tálknafjarðarhreppur and Vesturbyggð merged; • Consideration of new geographical names added by local authorities to the property register database (<i>fasteignaskrá</i>) maintained by HMS (https://fasteignaskra.is/english/properties/about-the-property-register/); • Consideration of new street-names taken into use by Reykjavík City Council (see further in Section D below). <p>In addition to the above, HMS is working towards mapping all property boundaries around Iceland on the basis of existing title deeds and other sources in the project “Áætlun eignamarka”. This programme will focus on different parts of Iceland each year up to 2028.</p>
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<p>C</p> <p>National and international meetings, conferences, symposiums, publicity and publications</p> <p>- date of the meeting - name of the meeting - place of the meeting - main theme - useful information from the meeting - in case of publications, guidelines: how often are they issued, what is the content of these publications - publicity: articles in international professional magazines, publication of own professional magazines.</p>	<p>Significant activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nafnabing: The annual half-day conference organised by Nafnfræðifélagið/Icelandic Onomastics Society, was held in Edda, Reykjavík, on the 14th October 2023 (on the theme of ‘Nöfn og skáldskapur’, names and literature), and on the 19th October 2024 (on the theme of ‘Örnefni á vettvangi’, place-names in the field). The conference is free, open to all, and is well attended. Speakers included authors and academics from different fields. Membership of the society has increased on an annual basis over the past four years. • Nöfn á nýrri öld. 20 greinar í tilefni 20 ára afmælis Nafnfræðifélagsins: A large-format book with 20 chapters about different aspects of Icelandic names was published in 2023 by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, in collaboration with Nafnfræðifélagið/Icelandic Onomastics Society. About half the chapters are concerned with Icelandic geographical names, past and present, their collection, their position according to Icelandic legislation, and their significance from the perspective of cultural heritage. The book is aimed at a general readership and received good reviews in Icelandic media. It can be bought here: https://www.boksala.is/product/nofn-a-nyrri-old/ • Academic articles and reports treating aspects of geographical names were published in the Icelandic journal <i>Orð og tunga</i>, with English summaries, in volumes 25 (2023) and 26 (2024): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Svavar Sigmundsson, ‘Blótsyrði og örnefni’ (‘Swearwords and place-names’), https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/287 ○ Ármann Jakobsson and Guðrún Kvaran, ‘Götunöfn í Reykjavík 2001-2023’ (‘Street-names in Reykjavík’), https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/290 ○ Sigurður R. Helgason, ‘Óðinn á Íslandi í ljósi mannanafna og örnefna’ (‘Óðinn in Iceland on the basis of personal names and place-names’), https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/306 ○ Aðalsteinn Hákonarson, ‘Opinber stafrænn örnefnagrunnur: Skráning og hnitsetning örnefna og örnefnastýring’ (‘An open digital place-name database: Registration and geolocation of place-names and place-name standardization’), https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/308 ○ Aðalsteinn Hákonarson, ‘Skjólborg og Skjaldborg - Högni og Högn - Sundhnúksgígar eða Sundhnúkagígar’ (‘Skjólborg and Skjaldborg - Högni and Högn - Sundhnúksgígar or Sundhnúkagígar’), https://ordogtungu.arnastofnun.is/index.php/ord-og-tunga/article/view/310/161 • A new, informal platform for short pieces about the Icelandic language (including geographical names) is the online publication <i>Mannamál</i> (https://mannamal.is/) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://mannamal.is/amerikufloi-og-danmerkursund/ (discussion of geographical names of seas around Iceland and Greenland).
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D	Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, including the economic and social benefits <i>Information, recommendations, guidelines in legislative, control management .</i>	<p>UNGEGN Strategies 1 & 3: The work of the Icelandic Place-Name Committee is outlined in section B above. Over the course of the current working period, the Committee plans to implement current legislation regarding geographical names in a more active and responsive way than in the previous term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An example of this is the Committee's objection to the new street-name <i>Bjargargata</i> in Reykjavík, on the grounds that it is too similar to an existing street-name, <i>Bjarkargata</i>, in the same district, and thus it might give rise to misunderstandings not least from a safety perspective (i.e. communication with emergency services). The Committee used its right to take up matters independently and drafted a letter to Reykjavík City Council, which has 8 weeks to respond (https://fundur.reykjavik.is/sites/default/files/agenda-items/%C3%9Arskur%C3%B0ur_%C3%B6rnefnanefndar_M%C3%A1ll_1-2025_Bjargargata.pdf). According to the 2015 Place-Name Act, local authorities hold responsibility for choosing new street-names but these names must align with the broader working principles governing the creation of new geographical names, as set out in the laws. The Committee's intervention was reported by the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service RÚV: https://www.ruv.is/frettir/innlent/2025-03-06-reykjavikurborg-gert-ad-endurnefna-bjargargotu-438253. The Committee's annual reports are available online here: https://www.arnastofnun.is/is/arsskyrslur-ornefnanefndar <p>UNGEGN Strategy 4: Measures taken to demonstrate the importance of Icelandic geographical names in the context of the country's cultural heritage and identity include focus on Icelandic geographical names in the newly-opened permanent exhibition <i>Heimur í orðum / World in Words</i> at Edda, Reykjavík:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Heimur í orðum // World in Words</i> was developed by the Árni Magnússon Institute and opened in 2024. Part of the exhibition focuses on Icelandic place-names. Interactive displays in the section 'Út og suður / Out and about' explore contexts in which Icelandic place-names have been preserved, their meanings, and what they can communicate about the environment and how Iceland is connected to the rest of the world. An online resource that complements the physical exhibition is found here: https://heimuriordum.is/syning/ut-og-sudur. Alongside the exhibition itself, the Institute organises events that are open to the public and that build on the exhibition, and also works with school groups (Icelandic and visiting) on information dissemination. Discussions and pilot studies are being conducted on how to increase knowledge and interest regarding geographical names in schools.
E	National standardization	
Ea	Field collection of names	No centrally-organised field collection is currently being conducted but the work of local volunteers around the country who geo-reference geographical names listed in place-name records sometimes results in previously unrecorded names being introduced to the corpus. This work is co-ordinated by NÁTT.
Eb	Office treatment of names	<p>Office treatment of names takes place within the following contexts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> as part of work by NÁTT on maintaining the Icelandic Place-Name Database (see above, section B) as part of work by HMS on maintaining the Staðfangaskrá / Icelandic Access Address Register (see above, section B) within academic research contexts, at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, and other departments (e.g. Geography, tourism, folkloristics) that are part of the University of Iceland.

E c	Treatment of names in multilingual areas	Iceland is historically a unilingual country. Icelandic, which is written in a Latin alphabet, is the national language and the only official language in Iceland according to the 2011 ‘Law on the position of the Icelandic Language and the Icelandic Sign Language’ (https://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2011.061.html), which also states that Icelandic Sign Language is officially recognized by the Icelandic government. Only names in Icelandic are the object of official efforts to standardize and collect place-names. Dialectal differences in Iceland are insubstantial and do not affect the written form of place-names.
E d	Administrative structure of national names authorities, legislation, policies and procedures	As noted above in Section B, current toponymic legislation in Iceland is the 2015 Place-Name Act, designed to encompass a broad spectrum of place-name matters from issues of official standardization and regulation of geographical names to the status of place-names as cultural heritage. The 2015 Place-Name Act can be found here (https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2015022.html , in Icelandic). The broad scope is set out in the first paragraph of the Act where the aims are stated as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to promote the protection of place-names and naming traditions in the country as part of Icelandic cultural heritage and to ensure that it is maintained for future generations; • to ensure that new place-names conform to the rules of the Icelandic language; • to ensure that new place-names are consistent with Icelandic topography and naming traditions; • to co-ordinate administrative procedures in the registration of geographical names, so that the process of naming is open, transparent and effective.
E e	Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors	Toponymic guidelines are published by NÁTT https://www.lmi.is/is/landupplýsingar/ornefni/ornefnaskraning (in Icelandic). A hierarchical list of place-types (Icel: <i>nafnberar</i>) in the Icelandic Place-Name Database is here: https://www.lmi.is/static/files/ornefni/birtingarflokkar-list_100120_bg.pdf . Definitions of the place-types is here: https://www.lmi.is/static/files/ornefni/skilgreiningar-nafnbera_isl-003.pdf .
F.	Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity <i>Including indigenous, minority and regional language names.</i>	See information in Section D above. Other recent and ongoing projects that highlight geographical names as cultural heritage include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information collected about place-names all around the UNESCO-site and National Park Þingvellir, published on the Þingvellir website at https://www.thingvellir.is/fraedsla/ornefnaskra/. On the 16th November 2024, Icelandic Language Day, 16 ‘peculiar’ geographical names were discussed on the Þingvellir website, accompanied by photos and a map, https://www.thingvellir.is/fraedsla/ornefnaskra/yfirlit/serkennileg-oernefni-a-thingvoellum?fbclid=IwY2xjawI9e0ZleHRuA2FlbQIxmQABHSMhjQY1u_L9B2EF079P7dul16LnOgBvNaxGiMT2nP_2wtZUE6SMHF-RGw_aem_-mUiZuFiVTTGhoIqzhY0jQ. • doctoral research being undertaken by Birna Lárusdóttir at the University of Iceland on place-names on the island of Surtsey (https://english.hi.is/news/how-do-place-names-evolve).
G .	Exonyms <i>New exonyms, extinct exonyms, projects regarding exonyms.</i>	Work is being undertaken to update the list of country names (<i>ríkjaheiti</i>) published on the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. An article about exonyms was published by a staff member on the University of Iceland <i>Web of Science</i> in 2024 (https://www.visindavefur.is/svar.php?id=86399). Staff at the Árni Magnússon Institute and the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs communicate about exonyms and their use in public-facing contexts.
H .	Toponymic data files and gazetteers	

H a	Content requirements and standards	
H b	Data management and interoperability	<p>All geographical name data in the official Icelandic place-name database (Örnefnasjá) maintained by NÁTT is published open access according to CC BY 4.0 – Attribution 4.0 International Deed in conjunction with Icelandic legislation about reuse of public data, Lög um endurnot opinberra upplýsinga nr. 45/2018. The data package is the ‘IS-50V’ package here: https://www.lmi.is/is/landupplýsingar/gagnagrunnar/nidurhal.</p> <p>Icelandic geographical names from the NÁTT place-name database are also available in the Open Gazetteer service maintained by Euro Geographics (at https://www.mapsforeurope.org/datasets/open-gazetteer) and in a limited format via their Euro Regional Map (https://www.mapsforeurope.org/datasets/euro-regional-map).</p> <p>Geographical names data published by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies are also available open access according to the Institute’s OA policy (https://arnastofnun.is/is/stefna-um-opinn-adgang-og-opin-gogn).</p>
H c	Data services, applications and products <i>Including gazetteers and web services.</i>	<p>In addition to government-funded agencies and institutes that handle geographical name data, private companies in Iceland that offer topographical data and web services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loftmyndir ehf (https://www.loftmyndir.is/ and https://www.map.is/base/) • Alta ehf (https://www.alta.is/)
I	Terminology in the standardization of geographical names <i>New or changed definitions and terms.</i>	<p>At the termbank maintained by the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (https://idordabanki.arnastofnun.is/) some terminology relating to geographical names is available within the following collections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LISA (Samtök um landupplýsingar á Íslandi fyrir alla / GIS, see https://idordabanki.arnastofnun.is/leit//ordabok/LISA); • Landafræði / geography (https://idordabanki.arnastofnun.is/leit//ordabok/LAND) • Ríkjaheiti / country names (https://idordabanki.arnastofnun.is/leit//ordabok/RIKJAHEITI).
J	Writing systems and pronunciation	
J a	Romanization	n/a
J b	Conversion into non-Roman writing systems	n/a
J c	Writing of names in unwritten languages	n/a
J d	Pronunciation	

K	Country names <i>New or changed country names from the UNGEGN List of Country Names that were imported to the list of geonames in this country (in language of this country).</i>	n/a
L	Toponymic education <i>Toponymical courses, works in organisation, issues and solution of problems.</i>	Nothing to report.
M	Features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation	
M a	Features common to two or more nations	Nothing to report.
M b	Bilateral and multilateral agreements	Nothing to report.
M c	Coastal seas	<p>Icelandic Coast Guard / Landhelgisgæsla Íslands (www.lhg.is) publishes nautical charts. Information about hydrographic surveying and nautical charting is here: https://www.lhg.is/en/hydrographic-department/. Iceland is a member of IHO.</p> <p>Marine and Freshwater Research Institute / Hafrannsóknarstofnun continues its major initiative of mapping the seabed around Iceland (the project began in 2017 and runs until 2029), see https://www.hafogvatn.is/is/rannsoknir/kortlagning-hafsbotnsins.</p>

M d	Geonames of internatio nal waters and marine features in internatio nal waters	Nothing to report.
M e	Geonames in Antarctica	Nothing to report.
M f	Internatio nal cooperatio n <i>Cooperation with institutions, countries – specific project.</i>	Nothing to report.
N .	Arrange ments for the UNGE GN <i>Creating national and other reports, creating articles for Bulletin, communicati on, cooperation and fulfilment of tasks from the UNGE GN.</i>	<p>Iceland is involved in preparing the following reports and working papers in addition to this country report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of the Norden Division, GEGN.2/2025/57/CRP.57 • Working paper GEGN.2/2025/93/CRP.93, ‘Public engagement with geographical names in Iceland in social media contexts’. <p>One article submitted by Iceland was published in volume 68 of the <i>UNGE GN Bulletin</i> (December 2024), on the subject of ‘Geographical names and cultural heritage in Iceland: Current work and future challenges’.</p>
O	Supportin g sustainabl e developm ent <i>Activities related to geonames that support sustainable development .</i>	Nothing to report.

P	Other <i>If the country has worked on something special, that is not mentioned in this model.</i>	Nothing to report.
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Additional instructions:

*if the country has no news or information relevant to the theme, please fill in: **without changes:** the country is solving or has solved the theme but has no news in this period

*if the country hasn't solved the theme, please fill in: **unsolved** (the theme hasn't been solved in this country yet – it hasn't been necessary or it hasn't been possible)

*please, fill in the national report with a few key words, concisely and clearly (except Summary), but if it is necessary, describe it in more detail

*this is the model of the national report, which is recommended to use when creating the national report of your country. It is only a recommendation. It's up to you/your choice, if you follow this model or you create your own format of the national report.