

Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Georgia

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee



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1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of Georgia for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in US Government databases, publications, maps, and charts. The country policies are intended to satisfy, in part, the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

2. Languages and Language Policy

a. Demographics

The population of Georgia is approximately 3.7 million persons¹, the vast majority of whom—about 87%— are ethnic Georgians. Predominant minorities include Armenians, Azeris, and Russians. Emigration, especially in the years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, combined with low birth rates, has contributed to significant population loss in Georgia.

b. Languages

Georgian (ISO 639-3 code *kat*) is the official language of Georgia. Within the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Abkhazian is another official language alongside Georgian. Minority languages spoken in Georgia include Mingrelian, spoken by about half a million people in northwestern Georgia, as well as Laz and Svan, each with about 30,000 speakers.²

The Georgian language, a member of the Kartvelian family, has one of the oldest writing systems in the world. Throughout its history, the Georgian language has had three different alphabets, all of which are included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) list of intangible cultural heritage.³ *Asomtavruli* (also known as *Mrglovani*) was the oldest, estimated to be created in 300 BC. *Nuskhuri* appeared from 10th century AD, mostly used in religious literature. Between 10-11th century AD, the *Mkhedruli* alphabet developed in parallel to the other two. *Mkhedruli*, a unique, flowing script, is the modern-day Georgian alphabet and consists of 33 letters—5 vowels and 28 consonants. Georgia's mountainous terrain has contributed to preserving several distinct dialects in communities across the country, and the Kartlian dialect from the eastern part of the country is the basis of the standard language. Outside of Georgia, the Georgian language is used in communities in Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran.

¹ GeoStat National Statistics Office of Georgia www.geostat.ge, 2018 figures

² *Georgian Alphabet* Omniglot www.omniglot.com/writing/georgian2.htm Accessed 23 May 2019

³ www.ich.unesco.org

c. Geographic Names Standardization

Georgia's authority for geographic names and statistics is the National Statistics Office of Georgia, which publishes census, demographic, economic and other data. In collaboration with the National Statistics Office and with support from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Institute of Geography at Tbilisi State University released a 2018 National Atlas of Georgia (ISBN 978-3-515-12057-9) a revised and updated work published in English.

3. Toponymic Policies

a. Orthography

Geographic names standardization will follow Georgian orthographic conventions. The user of Georgian geographic sources should be aware that some non-official sources may occasionally contain variant place names or generic terms in other languages (example: Russian, Abkhazian) as a holdover from Soviet conventions.

b. Romanization

Romanization of Georgian place names shall be in accordance with the BGN/PCGN System for Georgian adopted in 2009, which supersedes and contains some significant differences from the 1981 version. The 2009 BGN/PCGN Agreement corresponds to the system devised in 2002 by the State Department of Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia and the Institute of Linguistics of the Georgian Academy of Sciences.

c. Diacritics

The only diacritical mark encountered in approved names for Georgia is a ' (Right Single Quotation Mark- Unicode value 2019), which is found in conjunction with the characters: კ (k'), პ (p'), ტ (t'), ყ (q'), წ (ts'), and ჩ (ch'). Per the 2009 BGN/PCGN Romanization system⁴, this mark denotes ejective (glottalized) consonants, a significant change from the previous standard outlined in the 1981 system, which instead used this diacritical mark to denote aspirated consonants.

d. Generic Terms

A generic is a term used to describe a geographic feature, such as 'river,' 'hill,' and 'lake.' If the generic term does not identify the feature, the term should be considered a false generic and should not be added to the generic field of the GNDB. Generic terms are not collected for populated places. Appendix B provides a partial list of common generic terms one may encounter in Georgian geographic names sources. Abbreviated generics found on native sources should be expanded when collecting; see **Section 3. Toponymic Policies**, Sub-section **h. Abbreviations** below.

⁴ Romanization of Georgian. Georgia 2002 National System, BGN/PCGN 2009 Agreement.

e. Hyphenation, Capitalization, and Spelling

The user should be aware that the Georgian alphabet does not distinguish between lowercase and uppercase letters. In the past, scholars have attempted to introduce uppercase characters based on the historic *Asomtavruli* alphabet, although those attempts have been largely unsuccessful.⁵ There is a special uppercase of the modern secular alphabet, which is analogous to using “All Caps” in the Latin Script, but it consists of a larger version of the standard alphabet as opposed to having any significant differences in the characters. Still, when romanizing Georgian names, the initial letter of all proper names as well as of the generic terms must be capitalized.

Hyphenated names should be romanized with a hyphen as well, with the initial letter of each distinct word capitalized.

f. Long and Short Forms

Long and short forms of names of populated places are approved when supported by official evidence.

Short forms are not added for Variant names in the GNDB. Short-form names are to be ranked as the primary approved name and the long form as the secondary approved name.

g. Numbers

Names containing cardinal or ordinal Arabic numerals should be generally expanded in the Georgian language. For example, “2” on source should be written as მეთორთვი (meore). Roman numerals found as part of the proper name are retained throughout.

h. Abbreviations

When used to denote generics, abbreviations must be expanded before recording in the Geographic Names Database (GNDB). If used to denote proper names, for example a person’s initials, abbreviations may be romanized in their original form.

i. Unique Linguistic Situations

Alternate Names

Feature names in Georgian sources may appear with alternate names in parentheses. Where supported by evidence, names in parentheses should be entered as Variant names in the GNDB.

Occasionally, the user may encounter place names that have been renamed—some, more than once—throughout different periods in Georgia’s history, particularly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union; thus, it is helpful to be aware of the date and production authority of the source.

⁵ The Unicode Standard. www.unicode.org/versions/latest/ Unicode, Inc., Mountain View, CA. March 2019

4. Political Geography Policy

a. Country Name

Conventional short form:	Georgia
Conventional long form:	none
Georgian short form – Romanized:	Sakartvelo
Georgian short form – Native Script:	საქართველო
Georgian long form – Romanized:	none
Georgian long form – Native Script:	none

b. Capital Name

Approved name:	Tbilisi
Native Script:	თბილისი

c. First-Order Administrative Divisions

ADM 1 Name	Generic	GEC	GENC	Seat
Abkhazia (Aphazeti)	Autonomous Republic	GG02	GE-AB	Sukhumi
Adjara (Ach'ara)	Autonomous Republic	GG04	GE-AJ	Batumi
Guria	Region	GG65	GE-GU	Ozurgeti
Imereti	Region	GG66	GE-IM	Kutaisi
K'akheti	Region	GG67	GE-KA	Telav'i
Kvemo Kartli	Region	GG68	GE-KK	Rustavi
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Region	GG69	GE-MM	Mtskheta
Rach'a-Lechkumi da Kvemo Svaneti	Region	GG70	GE-RL	Ambrolauri

Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti	Region	GG71	GE-SZ	Zugdidi
Samtskhe-Javakheti	Region	GG72	GE-SJ	Akhaltsikhe
Shida-Kartli	Region	GG73	GE-SK	Gori
Tbilisi ⁶	City	GG51	GE-TB	Tbilisi

d. Conventional Names

Conventional names are approved for the following geographic features in Georgia:

Name	UFI	UNI	Designation Code
Abkhazia (Conventional)/Aphkhazeti (Georgian)	-2325749	-3209213	ADM1
Ajaria (Conventional)/Ach'ara (Georgian)	-2325824	-3209357	ADM1
Caucasus/ Caucasus Region (Conventional)	-2326446	406443	RGN
Caucasus Mountains	-2891161	9030291	MTS
Georgia	-2327346	-3211630	RGN
Georgia	-2327232	9084714	PCLI
Kura River	-763694	17874680	STM
Transcaucasia	-3043994	-4267324	RGN

Disputed Territories

For the latest information on disputed territories, please consult the US Department of State Office of the Geographer and Global Issues.

The United States does not recognize any breakaway claims in Georgia, however, two

⁶ In addition to having status equivalent to a first-order administrative division, Tbilisi is also the national capital of Georgia (PPLC).

territories—Abkhazia and South Ossetia—currently claim independence from the Georgian state. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia fought a civil war that led to two ongoing separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (also known as Tskhinvali). These areas in the northwest and north-central portions of Georgia, unilaterally declared independence from Georgia following armed conflicts in 1992.

5. Sources

The preferred authority for Georgian map and chart sources is the National Statistics Office of Georgia, accessed at www.geostat.ge and the 2018 National Atlas of Georgia (ISBN 978-3-515-12057-9)⁷, published by the Institute of Geography at Tbilisi State University.

The National Statistics Office of Georgia provides a robust online GIS viewer with updated place names and points of interest in native script and in English, as well as terrain information. It is accessible at <http://gis.geostat.ge/geomap/>

Additional sources for Georgian map and place name information include the Agency of Protected Areas and the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

⁷ National Atlas of Georgia, 2018 edition. Bolashvili, Nana et al (ed.)

Appendix A: Common Generic Terms

Georgian Script	Romanization	Translation
არხი	Arkhi	Canal
ქალაქი	Kalaki	City
მთის	Mtis	Mountain
რკინიგზის სადგურო	Rk'inigzis Sadguro	Railway Station
ტბა	T'ba	Lake
ტყე	T'ke	Forest
წყალი	Ts'kali	River, water
წყალსაცავი	Ts'q'alsatsavi	Reservoir
უღელტეხილი	Ughelt'ekhili	Mountain pass

Appendix B. Map, First-Order Administrative Divisions of Georgia

