

South Africa

Country name	South Africa
State title	Republic of South Africa
Name of citizen	South African
Official languages	Northern Sotho (<i>nso</i>) ¹ ; Sesotho (<i>sot</i>); Setswana (<i>tsn</i>); Swati (<i>ssw</i>); Tshivenda (<i>ven</i>); Xitsonga (<i>tso</i>); Afrikaans (<i>afr</i>); English (<i>eng</i>); Ndebele (<i>nbl</i>); Xhosa (<i>xho</i>); Zulu (<i>zul</i>); South African Sign Language (<i>sfs</i>) ²
Country name in official languages	Afrika-Borwa (<i>nso</i>) Afrika Borwa (<i>sot</i>) Aforika Borwa (<i>tsn</i>) Ningizimu Afrika (<i>ssw</i>) Afurika Tshipembe (<i>ven</i>) Afrika Dzonga (<i>tso</i>) Suid-Afrika (<i>afr</i>) South Africa (<i>eng</i>) Sewula Afrika (<i>nbl</i>) Mzantsi Afrika (<i>xho</i>) Ningizimu Afrika (<i>zul</i>)
Script	Roman script
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	ZA/ZAF
Capitals	Pretoria (administrative) Bloemfontein (judicial) Cape Town (legislative) ³
Area / Population	1.22 million km ² / 61 million (2023 est.) ⁴

Introduction

Lying at the southernmost point of Africa, the territory of South Africa extends to include the Prince Edward Islands, two uninhabited islands located approximately 1770km to the south in the southern Indian Ocean. Completely surrounded by South Africa is the landlocked country of Lesotho. South Africa also shares land boundaries with Botswana, Eswatini⁵, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

South Africa has three capitals: Cape Town, in Western Cape province is the legislative and commercial capital where the country's Parliament is found; Bloemfontein, in Free State province is the judicial capital;

¹ Sometimes called Pedi or Sepedi.

² ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

³ The South African constitution states: The seat of Parliament is Cape Town, but an Act of Parliament enacted in accordance with section 76(1) and (5) may determine that the seat of Parliament is elsewhere.

⁴ www.statssa.gov.za

⁵ Formerly Swaziland.

Pretoria⁶ in Gauteng province is the administrative capital. Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town should all be shown as capitals, an explanatory note can be added to mapping products. It is notable that Johannesburg, rather than any of the capitals, is the largest city.

Geographical names policy

Place names may derive from any of the local languages; these will be represented using Roman-script characters as well as special characters (see Languages below), which should be retained. For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official South African sources, such as maps produced by South Africa's national mapping agency, the [National Geo-spatial Information](#) or the [South African Geographical Names Council](#) (SAGNC) website and publications.

The [Africa Geoportal](#) may be used as a helpful source of geospatial data and names⁷; the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server](#) can also be used as a source for names, although it should be noted that not all recent name changes have been reflected.

Place name changes

Many city, town and street names in South Africa have been changed as part of post-apartheid efforts to promote inclusivity. While some changes involve restoring the majority languages' place names, others introduce entirely new names. It is notable that some name changes are more quickly adopted than others. The [South African Geographical Names Council](#) (SAGNC) is the body responsible for the standardization and regulation of geographical names in South Africa. It was established under the South African Geographical Names Act of 1998 and works to ensure consistency and inclusivity in naming of places across the country. The SAGNC regularly publishes [Government Notices](#) regarding official geographical names on the South African Government website.

On the next page are some examples of the place name changes. The previous names can be retained, if necessary (in brackets); however, once names are well established, PCGN usually recommends adopting the new names alone, with some exceptions such as Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), where PCGN would recommend continued reference to the former name.

Caution is advised when considering the adoption of new names, due to instances of name changes being reversed. For example, the renaming of Louis Trichardt, in Limpopo province, to Makhado (reflecting the name of the municipality). The change was reversed by the Supreme Court of Appeal in 2007, however, in 2011, it was announced once more that the name had been changed to Makhado. This decision was appealed, and in 2014 the name reverted to Louis Trichardt. For clarity, PCGN recommends putting Makhado in brackets: Louis Richardt (Makhado).

Another example is the city of Durban, within the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality (which also includes other towns and suburbs), established in 2000. Despite efforts to rename the city to eThekweni, resistance persists, and the name of the city remains unchanged. Therefore, for the time being PCGN recommends simply using the name Durban.

For further specific information, please contact PCGN.

⁶ There was a proposal to change the name Pretoria to Tshwane, which is the name of the metropolitan municipality, however, there has been resistance, and the change has not occurred to the city itself.

⁷ This is a source collated from multiple sources, including Esri, organisations working in Africa and crowdsourced information. It should be used as a supplementary reference.

Example place name changes in South Africa

New name	Former name	Feature type	Province	Year of change
Gqeberha	Port Elizabeth	City and seaport	Eastern Cape	2021
Kariega	Uitenhage	Town	Eastern Cape	2021
Qonce	King William's Town	Town	Eastern Cape	2021
Nqanqarhu	MaClear Town	Town	Eastern Cape	2021
Ngqayi	Katkop	Town	Eastern Cape	2021
Chief David Stuurman International Airport	Port Elizabeth International Airport	Airport	Eastern Cape	2021
Winnie Mandela	Brandfort	Town	Free State	2021
Thema	Kudube	Town	Gauteng	2021
Musina	Messina	Town	Limpopo	2003
Polokwane	Pietersburg	City	Limpopo	2005
Bela-Bela	Warmbaths	Town	Limpopo	2002
Uhelo	Driehoek	Town	Mpumalanga	2021
Bo-Kaap	Schotchkloof	Suburb	Western Cape	2016

Languages

South Africa is multilingual, with eleven official spoken languages: Northern Sotho (*nso*)⁸; Sesotho (*sot*)⁹; Setswana (*tsn*)¹⁰; Swati (*ssw*)¹¹; Tshivenda (*ven*)¹²; Xitsonga (*tso*)¹³; Afrikaans (*afr*); English (*eng*); Ndebele (*nbl*)¹⁴; Xhosa (*xho*); Zulu (*zul*); plus, South African Sign Language (*sfs*). Most South Africans can speak at least two or more of the official languages. Of these, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa and English are the four most widely spoken languages. English is commonly used in education, government documents and communication at a national level.¹⁵

In addition to the twelve official languages, the South African constitution makes provision for further non-official “national” languages which the [Pan South African Language Board](#) promotes, including the Khoi, Nama and San (*khi*) languages.

⁸ Northern Sotho, also known as *Sesotho sa Leboa*, commonly referred to as Pedi or Sepedi.

⁹ Southern Sotho, also known as Sotho.

¹⁰ Also called Tswana, previously spelled Sechuana.

¹¹ Also called Swazi.

¹² Also called Venda.

¹³ Also called Tsonga.

¹⁴ Also called Southern Ndebele.

¹⁵ [Incremental Introduction of African Languages – ISASA](#)

All South Africa's languages are written in the Roman script. However, it should be noted that some of South Africa's languages include click consonants: most have between 3 and 5 separate click consonants, and these are represented in differing ways in the written form. For instance, in the Xhosa name Gqeberha, /q/ is a click; in Xhosa, typically clicks are represented with the Roman letters /c/, /q/ and /x/.¹⁶

Others, including the Khoi, Nama and San languages, use symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet: Bilabial click /ɔ/ [Unicode encoding 0298]; dental click /ǀ/ [Unicode encoding 01C0]; Retroflex click /ɻ/ [Unicode encoding 01C3]; Alveolar click /ǃ/ [Unicode encoding 01C2]; Lateral click /ǁ/ [Unicode encoding 01C1], so these should be reflected in place names as appropriate. For example, the Khoi language name for Cape Town is ǁHui ǁGaeb (although PCGN would not recommend using this name on HMG products).

Map of South Africa



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

¹⁶ "Click" sounds can be difficult for those who are not native speakers to master. There are many online examples of how to say the new names, including this helpful [video](#) on YouTube.

Administrative structure

South Africa is divided into nine provinces at the first-order level of administration. The provinces are divided into 52 districts, which are either metropolitan or district municipalities.

Province (English)	ISO 3166-2 code	Available official language province names	Administrative centre	Location of centre
Eastern Cape	ZA-EC	Kapa Bohlabela (<i>nso</i>) Kapa Botjhabela (<i>sot</i>) Kapa Botlhaba (<i>tsn</i>) Kapa Vhubvaḏuvha (<i>ven</i>) Kapa-Vuxa (<i>tso</i>) Oos-Kaap (<i>afr</i>) iPumalanga-Kapa (<i>nbl</i>) Mpuma-Koloni (<i>xho</i>) Mpumalanga-Kapa (<i>zul</i>)	Bhisho	32°50'58"S 27°26'17"E
Free State	ZA-FS	Freistata (<i>nso</i>) Freistata (<i>sot</i>) Foreisetata (<i>tsn</i>) Fureisitata (<i>ven</i>) Free State (<i>tso</i>) Vrystaat (<i>afr</i>) iFreyistata (<i>nbl</i>) Freyistata (<i>xho</i>) Fuleyisitata (<i>zul</i>)	Bloemfontein	29°07'00"S 26°13'00"E
Gauteng	ZA-GP	Gauteng (<i>nso; ssw; tsn; ven; tso; afr; zul</i>) Kgauteng (<i>sot</i>) iGauteng (<i>nbl</i>) Rhawuti (<i>xho</i>)	Johannesburg	26°12'16"S 28°02'44"E
KwaZulu-Natal	ZA-KZN	GaZulu-Natala (<i>nso</i>) Hazolo-Natala (<i>sot</i>) KwaZulu-Natal (<i>tsn; tso; afr</i>) HaZulu-Natal (<i>ven</i>) iKwaZulu-Natal (<i>nbl</i>) KwaZulu-Natali (<i>ssw; zul</i>) KwaZulu-Natala (<i>xho</i>)	Pietermaritzburg ¹⁷	29°37'00"S 30°23'00"E
Limpopo ¹⁸	ZA-LP	Limpopo (<i>afr; nbl; nso; sot; ssw; tso; tsn; xho; zul</i>) Vhembe (<i>ven</i>)	Polokwane ¹⁹	23°54'00"S 29°27'00"E
Mpumalanga	ZA-MP	Mpumalanga (<i>afr; nso; sot; ssw; tso; tsn; ven; xho; zul</i>) iMpumalanga (<i>nbl</i>)	Mbombela ²⁰	25°27'57"S 30°59'07"E

¹⁷ Often shortened to Maritzburg or PMB.

¹⁸ Formerly Northern Province until 2002.

¹⁹ Name changed in 1995, formerly Pietersburg.

²⁰ Name changed in 2009, formerly Nelspruit.

Province (English)	ISO 3166-2 code	Available official language province names	Administrative centre	Location of centre
Northern Cape	ZA-NC	Kapa Leboya (<i>nso</i> ; <i>sot</i>) Kapa Bokone (<i>tsn</i>) Kapa Devhula (<i>ven</i>) Kapa-N'walungu (<i>tso</i>) Noord-Kaap (<i>afr</i>) iThagwini-Kapa (<i>nbl</i>) Mntla-Koloni (<i>xho</i>) Nyakatho-Kapa (<i>zul</i>)	Kimberley	28°44'18"S 24°45'50"E
North West	ZA-NW	Lebowa Bodikela (<i>nso</i>) Leboya (le) Bophirima (<i>sot</i>) Devhula-Vhukovhela (<i>ven</i>) Bokone Bophirima (<i>tsn</i>) N'walungu-Vupeladyambu (<i>tso</i>) Noordwes (<i>afr</i>) iThagwini-Tjhingalanga (<i>nbl</i>) Mntla-Ntshona (<i>xho</i>) Nyakatho-Ntshonalanga (<i>zul</i>)	Mafikeng ²¹	25°51'56"S 25°38'37"E
Western Cape	ZA-WC	Kapa Bodikela (<i>nso</i>) Kapa Bophirimela (<i>sot</i>) Kapa Bophirima (<i>tsn</i>) Kapa Vhukovhela (<i>ven</i>) Kapa-Vupeladyambu (<i>tso</i>) Wes-Kaap (<i>afr</i>) iTjhingalanga-Kapa (<i>nbl</i>) Ntshona-Koloni (<i>xho</i>) Ntshonalanga-Kapa (<i>zul</i>)	Cape Town	33°55'31"S 18°25'26"E

Disputed areas

The Orange river forms the international boundary between Namibia and South Africa. South Africa claims the river to the high-water level of the northern bank, but since independence from South Africa, Namibia has sought to change the delineation to the middle of the river. This remains disputed.

²¹ Previously spelt Mahikeng.

Other Significant Locations

PCGN Recommended Name ²²	Variant Names/Spellings	Location	Feature Type
Table Mountain	Huriþoaxa (<i>naq</i>), Tafelberg (<i>afr</i>)	33°57'S 18°24'E	Mountain
Cape of Good Hope	Kaap die Goeie Hoop (<i>afr</i>)	34°21'N 18°29'E	Cape
Orange	Gariep, Oranjerivier (<i>afr</i>), Senqu (Lesotho), Kai !Garib (<i>naq</i>)	28°38'N 16°27'E	River (South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia)
Limpopo	-	25°12'S 33°30'E	River (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe)
Kalahari Desert	-	23°00'S 22°E	Desert (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa)

Useful references

- Africa Geoportal: <https://www.africageoportal.com/>
- BBC Country Profile: [South Africa country profile - BBC News](#)
- CIA World Factbook: [South Africa - The World Factbook \(cia.gov\)](#)
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI):
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- FCDO Travel Advice: [South Africa travel advice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): [ZA - South Africa \(iso.org\)](#)
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- South Africa Geographic Names Site: <https://www.sagns.gov.za>
- South Africa national statistics institute: [Statistics South Africa](#) (SSA).
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](#)

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²² PCGN usually recommends conventional English names for international features, unless national variants are specifically required, or the relevant countries share an official language.