



UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES
Foreign Geographic Names:
Standardization Policy:
Names of Refugee Camps

The BGN's Foreign Geographic Names Standardization Principles apply to foreign geographic names in general and form the basis for its foreign names decisions. Additional normative regulations must be developed to address specific geographic and linguistic phenomena peculiar to countries or regional areas. Special classes of geographic names, such as high seas features, may also require special analysis and treatment. For this reason, the Board develops supplementary standardization policy and procedure on a country basis, and to address specific standardization issues.

Policy: Names of Refugee Camps

This policy applies to refugee camp features recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Affairs in the Near East (UNRWA)¹. The UN defines a refugee camp as a “temporary facility built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution or violence.”²

Currently, the UN recognizes 281 refugee camps in 35 countries worldwide. Neither UNHCR nor UNRWA administer these 281 camps; administration of the camps is the responsibility of the nations in which they are located. Many of these camps do not appear on native source material, primarily due to the ephemeral nature of many of the camps, as well as the widely varying release of new or revised cartographic materials. UNHCR and UNRWA publish the most accurate and consistent information regarding the names and locations of refugee camps, information of critical use to those who consume data in the Geographic Names Database (GNDB).

Policy:

- 1) The Approved name type (name type codes ‘N’ and ‘NS’) shall be attributed to all refugee camp features whose names are derived from either UNHCR or UNRWA sources.
- 2) Local names for refugee camps derived from official native sources may also be collected as Approved, however the UN-sourced name shall take precedence.

¹The primary UN agency whose mandate focuses on the treatment of refugees is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR’s mandate covers refugee affairs in the entire world, with the notable exception of Palestinian refugees, who are under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

² <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/>