

Address Systems for Refugee and IDP Camps - A Guidance Note

This Note¹ attempts to serve as a generic and quick reference for UNHCR field staff, in particular those responsible for site planning, registration, and GIS camp mapping, on how to create an address system for the residents living in a camp environment. While the refugee camps have often been built in a systematic manner, there has never been a requirement to assign addresses to refugee shelters. In many camps, address systems of different kinds are being used while in others there is simply none. New developments in the area of registration and camp mapping make it now essential to have a compatible and standardized address system in order to fully utilise these different information technologies. The principles contained in this note are applicable equally to IDPs in camps as well as mixed settlement of both host and displaced populations.

What is an address?

An address is a *prescribed combination of alpha - numerical system* that uniquely identifies the location where a person lives and/or may be communicated with. Historically, standardized address systems have been developed to communicate directly with an “addressee”. As such address systems are part of the development of administrative and managerial systems. When considering that the smallest villages or towns would have in most cases some mechanism of identifying the addresses of their residents, it should be obvious to think about an address system for a camp setting, where the population may reach several tens of thousands.

There is no substantive difference in an address in a town or city or that of a refugee/ IDP camp. Both are based on the identification of the location of a person. However, given that camps are temporary settlements which are often not static, but evolving and growing over time, the address requires certain flexibility and the possibility to grow with the settlement.

Why should refugees and IDPs have an address?

Refugees and IDPs have the same right to an address for their own communication needs as has any other person. Having an address makes the life of a refugee/ IDP easier: it facilitates the use of postal services, allow to direct relatives and family members to one’s residence and help individuals, families, and communities to “keep in touch”. It facilitates the exchange of messages and even informal family tracing systems. It also helps refugees/ IDPs to understand their responsibility vis-à-vis the shelter allocated to them when various assistance deliveries are linked with their physical address within the camp.

UNHCR, host government authorities and other aid agencies also have a strong interest in being able to communicate with refugees/ IDPs. A typical example may be sharing of information of where a vulnerable individual is located, or organizing food aid by the administrative division within the camp, etc. The address system is also essential when conducting a verification exercise within a camp. It also helps shelter agencies to monitor shelter rehabilitation or shelter material distribution. Hence, an address is important to direct the delivery of communications and assistance to individual refugees/ IDPs in an effective manner and to ensure that registration information is kept up to date. As such, individual address is an important protection tool.

What to think about when creating address system?

The camp address system follows the modular camp design approach. As per standard UNHCR guidelines, any camp should not be larger than 20,000 persons. It should be divided in the following entities which have recommended minimum, optimum and maximum number of persons:

¹ This Guidance Note should be shared with concerned UNHCR partners, especially camp management agencies.

<i>Entity names</i>	<i>No. of persons Minimum</i>	<i>No. of persons Optimum</i>	<i>No. of persons Maximum</i>
Camp	No more than 20,000		
Block = 16 communities	750	1,250	1,500
Community = 12 to 16 shelter	48	70	96
Shelter (= family)	4	5	6

An address system creates an hierarchical relationship between these entities by assigning a level to each entity. The lowest level of the address system is usually the Shelter. The aim is to identify each Shelter within a camp by a unique Address.

Below are the examples of address system following the modular camp design concept.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Entity name</i>	<i>Recommended address components for each level</i>
	Camp	Name of Camp
1.	Block	01 to 16
2.	Community	A to P or 01 to 16
3.	Shelter	01 to 16

Note: There is no limit to the number of Blocks a camp can have. If you use the alphabet for Block, you need to be certain that the camp will not grow to be more than 32,500.

Following the above address system, below are examples of how an address may look like:

Long:

Ms. Elodie Matisse
Kitali Camp,
Block 02, Community K, Shelter 12

Or

Ms Elodie Matisse
Kitali Camp,
Block 02, Community 11, Shelter 12

Short:

Ms Elodie Matisse
Kitali Camp, 02-K-12

Or

Ms Elodie Matisse
Kitali Camp, 02-11-12

It is important to note that all address components should be different within the same entity. For example, all Communities within the same Block must have different address components (e.g. Block 02 should not have 2 Community Ks). However, the names need not be unique within the camp as a whole. So it is possible to have Shelter 11 in Community A, Community B, Community C

Below are some additional guidelines to consider when creating an address system:

Guideline 1 *There must be only one address system*

It is extremely important that there is uniformity in the address system within an UNHCR country operation. Needless to say, it is difficult to understand an address if the system changes from one neighbourhood to another, and/or one town to another.

As a minimum, the names of each level within an address should be standardised within a country. For example, if the three levels within one camp are called, Block, Community and Shelter – this should

be the level names used in all the camps in the country. These names should be agreed with all stakeholders involved (Government, NGO partners and refugees themselves), to ensure that everyone working in the camp is using the “same language”.

Under no circumstances, should there be different address systems within the same camp.

Guideline 2 *There can only be one way of writing and spelling location names*

As UNHCR is increasingly automating its work processes, all location names, including those of refugee/ IDP camps, must have a uniform orthography. The various computer systems are being equipped with pre-defined and standardized location names and UNHCR offices will be called upon to clarify what is the exact spelling of a location and stick to that standardized name throughout the life cycle of an operation. This is also true for exchange of information with partners.

Guideline 3 *Follow the addressing convention once decided*

It is extremely important to continue the addressing convention once it has been decided in the operation, even though there may be a wish to have the addressing as logical as possible when seen on a map. For example, if a decision was made to use numbers for Blocks, the Block name must always remain a number regardless of the timing when the Block was created and the location within the camp.

For example, there are 16 Blocks in an existing camp, and there is a need to expand the camp. A new Block is built close to an existing “Block 3”. The new Block should be named “Block 17” – not “Block 3A” or “Block 3 Annex”.

Guideline 4 *Do not use Roman numerals in addresses*

Address components can be numbers or alphabets. Roman numbers are not recommended as the various software cannot distinguish them in a hierarchical order. When using alphabets as address components, you will need to ensure that alphabet is used in a level of address which does not expect to exceed 26. If you exceed 26, then you should continue by using 2 digits of alphabet. It is recommended to use AA, AB, AC... (rather than AA, BA, CA...).

Guideline 5 *Do not record names which are not alpha-numerical in the address*

In some instances, non alpha-numerical names can be assigned in order to simplify the system for illiterate refugees, such as colours or animal names. When selecting these additional names, teams should consult with refugees and employ cultural sensitivity:

<i>Block</i>	<i>Sample names</i>	
	<i>Colours</i>	<i>Animals</i>
1	Red	Antelope
2	Blue	Bear
3	Black	Camel
4	Orange	Dog
...

This additional name should, however, not be entered into the registration software, be printed on ration and/or ID cards, or any other documents that show an address.

What about additional entities to facilitate and organise the work on the ground?

For Administrative reasons, such as allocating staff responsibility or identifying the beneficiaries for food distribution, an operation may need to create an administrative level to group some of the Blocks together². This could be especially needed if the camps size is over 20,000 persons. These entities, for example “Sector” (or Phase/ Village/ Zones, etc.), can be created to facilitate the work on the ground. However, the camp address should not be dependant on a “Sector” and should be uniquely identifiable already at the Block level, following the address scheme indicated above. Should “Sectors” be created, it is recommended to use the alphabet for the address component.

<i>Block (unique)</i>	<i>Alphabet</i>	<i>Approximate number of persons</i>
01 to 04	A	5,000
05 to 08	B	5,000
09 to 12	C	5,000
13 to 16	D	5,000
17 to 20	E	5,000
...

How to record address in the “Profile Global Registration System (proGres)”

UNHCR has been embarking on the improvement of its refugee registration standards and systems following the adoption of Executive Committee Conclusion 91 of 2001 on the Registration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. In its wake, the concept of “continuous registration” was introduced which underlies both the UNHCR Registration Handbook³ and *proGres* registration software. Continuous registration requires close communication with each individual and his/her family, including home visits. Within this context an address is essential for the exact localization of households in a camp or any other refugee/ IDP settlement. Further, as indicated above and with any database software, it requires and assumes that there is uniformity in a country operation, i.e. that every camp in a given country follows the same address system.

The screenshot shows the address entry form in the proGres system. It includes the following fields:

- * Address Type: Asylum country - current (dropdown)
- I am here: Yes No
- * Country: TAN | Tanzania (dropdown)
- Location Level 1 (dropdown)
- Location Level 2 (dropdown)
- Location Level 3 (dropdown)
- Location Level 4 (dropdown)
- Location Level 5 (dropdown)
- Location Level 6 (dropdown)

Two red brackets on the right side of the form group the dropdowns into two categories:

- Country Level** (encompassing Country, Location Level 1, and Location Level 2):
 - Name of country
 - Level 1 - Administrative Level 1 (Province, Region etc)
 - Level 2 - Administrative Level 2 (District etc)
- Camp address** (encompassing Location Level 3, 4, 5, and 6):
 - Level 3 - Camp name
 - Level 4 - Block
 - Level 5 - Community
 - Level 6 - Shelter

² Note this additional grouping of Blocks corresponds to the “Sector” indicated in previous shelter guidelines.

³ The provisional version of the handbook was issued in 2003. A revised version will be published in 2006.

The *proGres* software allows six location levels for a single address:

- The highest and second highest administrative unit within a country (province/ region, District etc.) is always entered at *proGres* location level 1 and 2.
- **The name of the camp should always be entered in level 3.**
- The address within a camp starts from *proGres* Location level 3 onwards.
- The Block should be entered in Level 4 and Community in Level 5.
- **The smallest unit within a camp, usually the Shelter, is always entered at *proGres* location level 6.** This is a free text field allowing to adjust to changing situation on the ground. For example, a large family may have built an annex to their own shelter and the annex shelter has been named 4A as it is part of the family compound. The free text allows entry of that information.

How GIS relates to an address

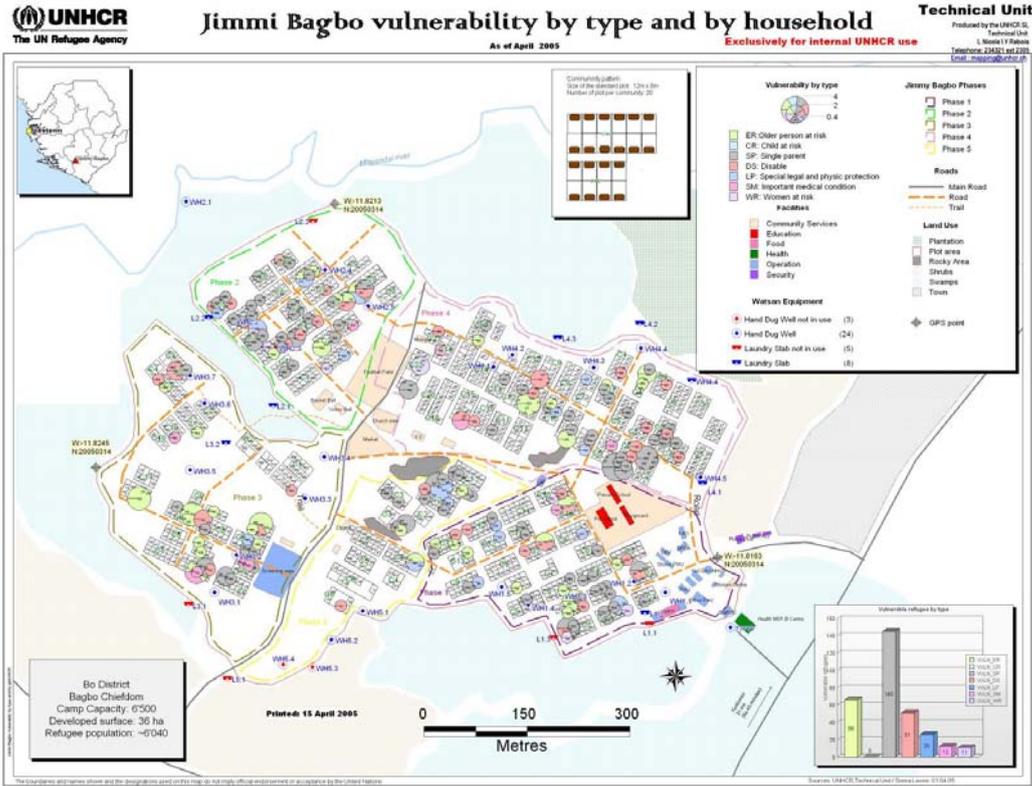
Registration data can be presented in maps as well as in tables and lists, allowing for easier/ visual analysis of complex tables. A Geographic Information System (GIS) is able to link any kind of data with a unique geographical entity to allow the creation of thematic maps. It becomes possible to develop specific thematic maps, such as the density of population within camps, the relationship between camp population and camp infrastructure, etc. Hence, GIS is an important element in an effective refugee/ IDP population and information management.

Example: Population density in the camp



In the context of camp mapping, the demographic and individual registration data can be linked with the camp address. The camp address needs to be recorded in a systematic and consistent manner as indicated above. This allows for the same data to be used for different presentation of information available. As per the example below, in order to create a map of a camp indicating the number of refugees with special needs, it is essential that the camp address is entered in proGres in a consistent manner, allowing for the information to be extracted and inserted in a GIS mapping software.

Example: Type of vulnerability by household in Jimmi Bagbo Camp



Maintaining an address system

Given its importance as a key linking feature between the various information technologies available to manage and support effective refugee/ IDP protection and assistance in a given country operation, an address system needs to be constantly updated and maintained. Furthermore, in order for the system to contribute to the verification of camp residents, it requires the clear demarcation and visualisation in the camps itself. Addresses should be fixed to each refugee shelter in a visible manner. Maintenance of an address system is part of the responsibilities of camp management, i.e. the Government or NGO partner in charge of constructing and maintaining the shelters and other camp infrastructure. Therefore, offices need to institute procedures that enable regular data exchange between UNHCR’s registration database and camp management agencies.

Further information and guidance on how to introduce and/or harmonize existing address systems can be obtained from the Field Information Coordination and Support Section (HQCS00@unhcr.org) and Technical Support Section (HQTS01@unhcr.org) of the Division of Operational Support (DOS). Guidance to adapt the existing camp address in proGres should be addressed to proGres Support (HQPROSUP@unhcr.org). Detailed technical instructions on how to code an address system in “proGres” and location codes (P-Codes) are available with proGres Support and FICSS respectively.