



Frequently Asked Questions

Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Returnees in Burundi



December 2024



Promotion of Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees

Since December 2023, UNHCR has shifted from facilitating to promoting the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees, following the recommendations of the tripartite meeting between the Burundian Government, the Tanzanian Government, and UNHCR.

All services provided during the voluntary repatriation process are free of charge and fully covered by UNHCR and its partners.

1. Voluntary Repatriation and the Right to Return

After years of asylum, refugees have the opportunity to return to their country of origin. The right to return is an inalienable right, recognized by international human rights conventions. UNHCR promotes voluntary return and works, in collaboration with the government and humanitarian and development agencies, to ensure that the reintegration of refugees is successful and sustainable. The government bears the primary responsibility for this reintegration. In Burundi, returnees are welcomed in transit centers, where they typically stay for one to two nights, receiving cash assistance before departing for their final destination.

2. Reception of the Convoy

- Reception of the convoy at the Transit Centers.
- Identification of individuals with specific needs and provision of protection-related counseling.
- Verification of presence based on the manifest received from the host country.
- Data verification in the UNHCR ProGres biometric database.
- Taking of photographs and issuance of the recognition certificate.
- Allocation of phones and a mobile transfer of 200 USD in Burundian Francs (BIF).
- Distribution of food and non-food items.
- Hot meals provided at the transit center.
- Transportation of returnees to their commune of return by the Government of Burundi through the Directorate General for Repatriation, Reinsertion, and Reintegration (DGRRR).

3. Repatriation Assistance

Assistance provided by UNHCR

- Cash Grant: Equivalent of 200 USD in Burundian Francs (BIF) per person (adult or minor) at the official exchange rate of the month, paid in a single payment. This assistance is provided by UNHCR via mobile transfer.
- Essential Humanitarian Items: One-time provision of essential items, based on household size, such as kitchen utensils, soap, blankets, loincloths, sanitary pads for women, jerrycans, buckets, mosquito nets, plastic mats, plastic tarps, flannel cloth, travel bags, etc.

Assistance provided by WFP

- Food Assistance: Food rations for 3 months (beans, oil, maize flour, salt) provided by WFP, based on household size.

4. What is a Repatriation Certificate?

It is a document provided by the DGRRR to all returnees upon their arrival. This document is not a civil status document, but it facilitates the acquisition of civil documents.

The registration of Burundian citizens and the issuance of civil status documents, including national identity cards and civil status certificates (birth, marriage, or death certificates), are the responsibility of the Burundian government.

The DGRRR and UNHCR (AIRD) organize secondary movements to the communes of return in dignity and safety, where returnees are welcomed by local authorities (communal administrators), who facilitate their reintegration.

5. Legal Framework

- Tripartite Agreement of 08/05/2001 with Tanzania
- Tripartite Agreement of 18/08/2005 with Rwanda
- Tripartite Agreement of 11/12/2009 with the DRC
- Tripartite Agreement of 27/03/2013 with Uganda

In practice, the implementation of repatriation movements is conducted in accordance with the Tripartite Agreements, and in their absence, through the conclusion of memoranda of understanding or special arrangements between all the parties involved.

Repatriation and fraud prevention:

All repatriation services, information and documentation are free of charge. Providing false information constitutes fraud and may result in rejection of your application and withdrawal of assistance.

Report fraud by contacting UNHCR staff and/or the Directorate General for Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration.

FAQ on the Reintegration of Returnees in Burundi

- **Rights and obligations:** Returnees regain all the rights of a national of their country upon their return.
- **Reintegration:** A process aimed at reintegrating returnees into the social, economic, and political life of their country. The Burundian government is responsible for the protection and coordination of reintegration programs.
- **Security in Burundi:** The country is generally calm and peaceful.
- **Access to education:** Primary education is free, and enrollment in schools is done at no cost.
- **Access to property:** Returnees have the right to recover their properties and must follow a land registration process to obtain a land certificate.

Questions relating to the right to return and reintegration

What does it mean to be repatriated?

For refugees, repatriation means voluntarily returning to their country of origin. This return can be:

- Spontaneous: the refugee returns by his or her own means, without informing the authorities in the country of asylum.
- Assisted: the return is organized with the support of the authorities in the country of origin, the country of asylum and the UNHCR.

In accordance with international law, when a refugee is voluntarily repatriated to his or her country of origin, he or she ceases to be a refugee, and regains the national protection of his or her country and all the rights of a national of that country.

What is reintegration? What are its objectives?

Who is responsible for its implementation?

Reintegration is a process that enables returnees to once again participate in the social, cultural, economic and political life of their country of origin.

It is sustainable once they have achieved a level of economic and legal self-sufficiency. Returnees must also show initiative in seizing every opportunity to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

The Government of Burundi is primarily responsible for the protection of returnees, as well as for the implementation and coordination of reintegration programs at national, provincial, communal and hill levels.

What is the security situation in Burundi?

The security situation in Burundi is generally calm. The country is at peace and there is no armed conflict. Nevertheless, common crimes do occur.

I am married to someone from outside my country of origin and we have children. Can my family return to my country with me?

Yes, the right to marry and found a family implies the right to live together. The non-Burundian spouse should in principle have a passport or another document issued by his or her country of origin (national passport, CEPGL certificate, etc.) or any other valid document proving his or her nationality (birth certificate, electoral card, etc.). If the spouse does not have a document proving his/her nationality, the Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) will be used as proof, indicating his/her country of origin in the "Individual comments" column of the VRF.

Questions about documentation

Are civil status documents issued free of charge or do I have to pay for them?

1. *Issuance of civil status documents (birth certificates, death certificates)*

In August 2022, the Ministry of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security issued a circular (valid for one year, renewable) announcing that birth certificates for repatriated children and death certificates will be issued free of charge by municipalities.

2. *Certificate of repatriation*

Document issued by the DGRRR to all returnees. Although it is not a civil status document, it allows access to the same basic social services as the identity card (registration of children, acquisition of a health insurance card, etc.).

3. *National Identity Card*

To obtain this card, returnees must present their certificate of repatriation or a birth certificate, a household notebook, a receipt certifying payment of the 500 FBU card fee, and two passport-size photos to the commune.

4. *Marriage certificate*

To obtain a marriage certificate, you must provide:

- A copy of an identity document or certificate of repatriation.
- Copy of birth certificate
- A copy of an extract from the civil status register certifying that you are not already married, less than one year old.
- In the case of a previous union, a copy of the divorce decree

5. *Documents to be provided by the foreign partner*

Your partner must provide the following documents:

- Passport or other identity document
- Official document showing address
- Certificate of celibacy

What legal services are available to returnees?

The Bujumbura Bar Association: a lawyer can be made available to returnees in need of legal assistance. The Bar Association provides legal assistance to returnees in their areas of return who cannot afford the services of a lawyer, to accompany them to court and/or provide them with appropriate legal advice, given their precarious socio-economic situation.

Toll-free number: +257 79 22 2000

If you have a legal problem or an urgent risk, you can call this number free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for advice or assistance.

Services provided for the survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

What services are available for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV)?

After their return to Burundi, returnees have access to a range of specific services for survivors of GBV:

- **Psychological support:** Psychosocial support is provided, offering attentive listening and follow-up to help survivors overcome their trauma.

- **Registration of specific needs:** Upon arrival, an individual assessment is carried out to identify specific needs and refer survivors to the appropriate services.
- **Educational support:** Awareness-raising initiatives and return to school support will be provided for child and adolescent survivors of GBV to help them return to education.
- **Specialised health care:** Survivors will have access to appropriate medical care, including treatment for physical injuries and psychological support for trauma.

These services are provided both in transit centres and in host communities, in close collaboration with local authorities and humanitarian partners. Save the Children, the main partner in the response to GBV, ensures that survivors receive ongoing support and easy access to all these services.

Issues relating to education, access to basic social services and financial services

Will we be able to enroll our children in school immediately after our return, and will we have to pay school fees?

Returnee children have the right to return to school in their return area.

The school year starts in September and ends at the end of June. Kirundi is used as the language of instruction from 1st to 4th grade, then French from 5th to 9th grade.

Basic schooling lasts 9 years and is free at all levels. However, families may be required to make a contribution that is not considered a minerval (to pay for janitors, buy or repair b How to open a bank account or obtain loans.

Equivalence of diplomas (national competitive examination/state examination), school and university qualifications.

It can be obtained by submitting the relevant documents to the Equivalence Commission (in Bujumbura) and paying FBU 30,000.

Before you leave, don't forget to take the following with you:

- Your school certificate
- Your school reports for previous years and the current year
- Your certificate from the national competitive examination/State examination.

How to open a bank account?

Since June 21, 2023, returnees have benefited from a SIM card, a FinBank bank account opened free of charge, online banking services and the Pesaflash app to manage their account via their phone. Cash assistance (USD 200 per person) is paid directly into the head of household's Pesaflash account. A phone with SIM card is given to the transit center. This enables the family to use their money more easily, and to contact a commercial bank or microfinance institution to find out about the conditions for obtaining credit in Burundi, etc.).

Questions on property access and recovery

Do we have the right to reclaim our property?

Yes, every citizen has the right to reclaim his or her home, land and possessions on return to his or her country of origin.

What is required to obtain a title deed?

Obtaining a land certificate involves an application and a land survey. If there are no objections, the land certificate will be issued. Group survey operations (OGR) can be organized on the initiative of the local council or the inhabitants of a hill (or part of it). It is important to have your land certified and to involve wives or sisters in this process.

Procedure:

- Present a document attesting to the origin of the plot and a document proving your identity.
- Register at the Guichet Foncier for land recognition, with a 30-day public announcement.
- Go to the Guichet Unique to submit the application, where the fees to be paid (between 125 and 400 FBU/m²) will be calculated.
- Pay the fees to the Office Burundais des Recettes (OBR), then return to the Guichet Unique with the payment slip.

Demarcation is then carried out in the field, followed by a 30-day period for complaints. • A minimum of two months is required before the land certificate is issued.

Who should I contact in the event of a land dispute on my return to Burundi?

The mission of the Conseil des notables des collines is to reconcile disputing parties. It receives complaints and gives its opinion on civil cases before the courts. It is present throughout the country and has an unlimited mandate. The services of the Council of Notables are free of charge. In the event of failure to reach a settlement, the parties may refer the matter to the competent court.

What legal services are available to recover land, housing or property?

If you need legal assistance, organizations such as Icirore C'Amahoro (ICCA) or the Bujumbura Bar Association can provide a lawyer for a returnee in need. They provide legal assistance to returnees in their areas of return who are unable to pay for a lawyer and accompany them to court or provide them with legal advice appropriate to their socio-economic vulnerability.

Questions on reintegration assistance

What support is available to returnees in the return areas?

Letter of indigence

The government issues an attestation of indigence to vulnerable people aged 60 and over, and to people living with chronic illnesses or physical disabilities. The applicant or a neighbor presents him/herself to the chef de colline, who drafts a letter addressed to the Administrateur communal, mentioning the person's vulnerability. This letter is signed by the Conseiller de Développement Familial et Social (CDFS), then submitted to the local administrator, who issues a certificate of indigence. ***This certificate gives free access to health services, education and the distribution of tin or rice (if such assistance is available).***

Carte d'Assurance Médicale (CAM)

With the identity card or repatriation certificate, the returnee can buy a CAM for 3,000 FBU at a public health center. The CAM is valid for one year, renewable by the same procedure. Treatment begins at the nearest health center (CDS). If necessary, the CDS can refer the patient to the district hospital.

Fees

Patients aged 5 to 14 pay 800 FBU. Repatriates over 14 pay 500 FBU and benefit from all the care available at the CDS. In the event of hospitalization at the district hospital, a one-off payment of 12,000 FBU is required to benefit from all available care.

Health care for pregnant women and children under 5 is free of charge.

Qu'est-ce qu'une coopérative et comment puis-je y adhérer ?

There are economic interest groups that returnees can join to participate in the development of their hillside and to generate income to meet family needs. They can also set up their own cooperatives. The returnee must be

- Be at least 18 years old or an emancipated minor.
- Apply to and be accepted by the general assembly of the cooperative.
- Not be in direct competition with the cooperative of which they are members.
- Have paid their shares or subscriptions in accordance with the articles of association.

Can I set up a small business?

d'Entreprises allows entrepreneurs to set up any commercial enterprise, whatever its form, size, nature or the nationality of its partners or shareholders. All information is available online at : www.investburundi.bi

Documents required:

- Company name
- Minutes of incorporation
- Photocopy of identity document
- Power of attorney if necessary
- Commercial register registration fee of BIF 40,000