Cash-Based Interventions for Burundian Returnees

January - June 2026

As part of the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR, efforts to promote the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of Burundian refugees continued throughout the first half of 2026. To support this process, UNHCR strengthened the use of Cash-Based Interventions (CBIs) as a key assistance modality to help returnees meet their immediate needs and facilitate their reintegration into their communities of return. This document provides an overview of cash assistance returnees between January and June 2026, highlighting key achievements, protection outcomes, and remaining challenges. It also underscores the importance of sustained reintegration support to promote self-reliance and ensure durable solutions for returning populations.

Returnee families receiving documentation at the Nyabitare transit centre in Burundi, as part of organized return operations April 2026 ©UNHCR/Roda Ismael Aden

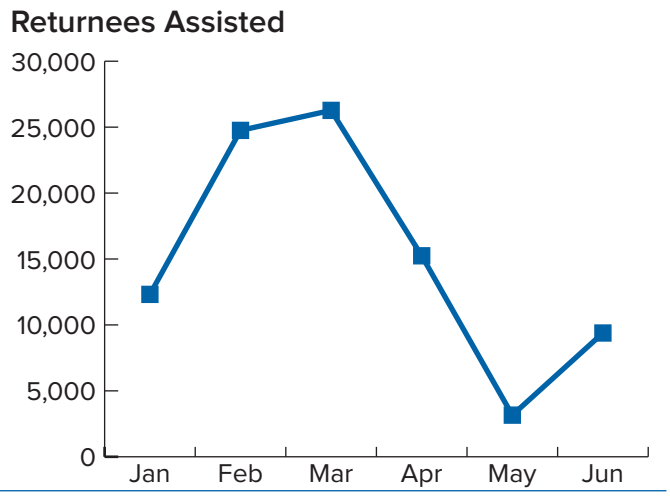
96,947
returnees (26,657 households)

US $21.8M
cash disbused

98.7%
returns from Tanzania

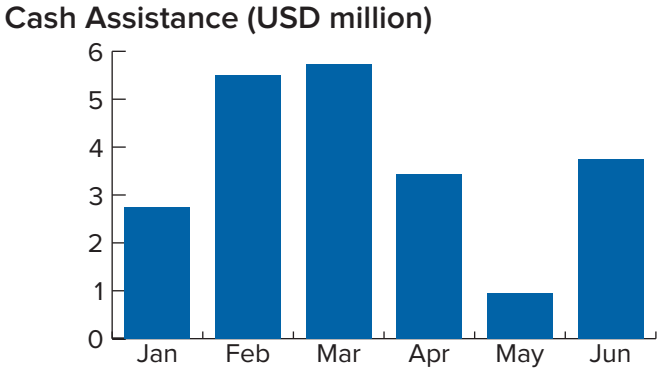
Operational Overview

- During the Tripartite Commission held in November 2025 between the Governments of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR, the Parties reaffirmed their commitment to accelerate the **voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration** of Burundian refugees, while ensuring that returns are conducted in safety and dignity and in line with international protection standards.
- In the context of reduced operational resources and efforts to improve efficiency, UNHCR introduced a **revised modality** for organized voluntary returns in April 2026. Unlike the previous approach, under which return convoys were transported to transit centres, returnees are now taken directly from Tanzania to their communes of return, without passing through transit facilities. Consequently, assistance is primarily focused on the issuance of **return attestations and the provision of cash grants** to help meet immediate needs and support early reintegration.
- The Government's Directorate of Repatriation, Reintegration and Resettlement (ARRR), together with local authorities, oversees the reception of return convoys at the commune level and provides targeted support to the most vulnerable returnees. The response has therefore shifted towards area-based post-arrival assistance, with cash-based interventions serving as the primary modality to facilitate early reintegration and support returnees in re-establishing themselves within their communities. The return package provided upon arrival includes a one-off cash grant of US $200 per person (paid in BIF at the official monthly exchange rate) and a US$20 top-up to support secondary transport from the provincial capital to the final place of return.
- From January to June 2026, UNHCR's cash-based intervention for organized returns assisted **26,657 households (96,947 returnees), with total expenditure of US $21.8 million**.
- During the reporting period, four operational phases were observed. The scale-up phase (January–February) was characterized by a steady increase in operational activity, with rising caseloads and expenditures. The peak phase (March) recorded the highest level of activity, with **8,007 households (26,295 returnees) assisted and US$ 5.74 million** in expenditure. This was followed by a slowdown phase (April–May), during which operational activity declined, reaching the lowest levels in May. A partial rebound was recorded in June, with increased activity, although still below March levels. During the week of 22–28 June, 5,439 returnees were assisted, with US$1.28 million in expenditure.
- Burundian returnees from Tanzania represented the largest caseload, with **95,698 individuals** (98.7% of all recorded returnees). Support provided to these returnees accounted for **US$21.6 million** in expenditure, representing approximately 99% of total spending recorded in the dataset. Returns from other countries, including DRC, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa, remained comparatively limited.



Protection outcomes following return

- Despite the difficult conditions they experienced prior to leaving Tanzania, the majority of returnees interviewed reported **being satisfied to have returned** to Burundi. Many cited the **restoration of their freedom of movement** as one of the main benefits of return, contrasting it with the restrictions they experienced while living in refugee camps. They noted that they are now able to move freely throughout the country and settle in the location of their choice without requiring special authorization.
- Several returnees also reported having **reunited with family members**, whose support has facilitated their reintegration. While socio-economic conditions remain challenging in Burundi, many emphasized that they now have the opportunity to pursue livelihood activities and gradually rebuild their self-reliance, under the same conditions as other Burundian citizens.



Returnees' perspectives on cash assistance

- To complement the quantitative analysis, UNHCR Protection teams conducted **key informant interviews** with selected returnee households during routine field monitoring missions. While the discussions explored returnees' broader reintegration experiences, they also sought to capture perceptions of the cash assistance received, including how it was used, its contribution to reintegration, and the challenges households continued to face after return.
- Returnee consistently reported that cash assistance played a critical role in helping them address their most immediate needs upon arrival. Cash was spent **on food, rent, healthcare, clothing, household items, education and transport**. Some households also used part of the assistance **to rent or purchase land**, construct or rehabilitate **their homes**, and invest in small income-generating activities, including the purchase of **livestock**, helping to lay the foundations for longer-term self-reliance.
- Most respondents reported that cash assistance had significantly or moderately improved their living conditions, reduced financial stress, and eased household financial pressures. However, many also noted that the assistance was insufficient to cover all essential needs. This underscores the continued vulnerabilities faced by returnees beyond the initial return package and the importance of sustained reintegration support. Reflecting on the support received, one returnee said, ***"I used the cash grant to meet initial needs upon arrival from the refugee camp and the rest to build a family house, which was a pressing need, having stayed in my father's house who stayed behind in Tanzania. Now I am struggling to get school fees for my children and to meet other essential needs like food, clothing"***. Another noted that with the cash grant, he could buy a plot of land where he has built a small house but wished had received more to help really reintegrate the community with a small business to allow a more decent life like other members of the community.
- A comprehensive post-distribution monitoring (PDM) exercise is planned in the coming months to provide more systematic evidence on the effectiveness, outcomes and impact of cash assistance and to inform future programming.

Needs and Gaps for Burundian Returnees

- Funding for the Burundian return response remains critically insufficient, despite nearly 100,000 returnees arriving during the first half of 2026.
- Cash assistance remains a critical component of the return response, enabling returnees to meet immediate needs and take initial steps towards rebuilding their lives. However, sustainable reintegration requires a holistic and multi-sectoral approach, combining continued cash-based assistance with strengthened protection monitoring to identify and respond to evolving needs, alongside complementary interventions in areas such as legal documentation, housing, land and property assistance, livelihoods, and support to national systems, including schools and health centres.
- Without sustained reintegration support, returnees face heightened protection risks, weakened reintegration prospects, increased pressure on host communities and a greater risk of onward displacement.

Financial Information

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