BURUNDI

Level 2 Registration Exercise of Congolese Refugees at Busuma site / Burundi © UNHCR / B. Ntwari

Hignlights

- **On 16 March 2026, UNHCR, ONPRA and CGM launched Level 2 registration at Busuma site** in Buhumuza Province. **As of 31 March, 14,116 individuals, representing 3,809 households, have been biometrically registered.** Registration activities will continue in April.
- **Since the reopening of the Gatumba–Kavimvira land border with the Democratic Republic of Congo on 23 February, UNHCR's protection teams have been monitoring movements at the border and engaging with returning populations. T**hroughout March, return trends remained consistent with those observed in previous weeks. Protection team conducted border monitoring and conducted interviews at the border to better understand the profiles, intentions, reasons and conditions of returnees. Among those who spontaneously returned in March 2026, a cumulative sample of 220 households interviewed, representing 1,133 individuals, were recorded as having left Busuma. These households presented registration documentation issued by UNHCR and ONPRA.
- **Some refugees in possession of Proof of Registration are nonetheless undertaking spontaneous return movements.** They reported that the registration process and facilitated return is a lengthy process to wait for.

Protection

- In March 2026, **protection actors UNHCR**, UNFPA, UNICEF, Burundi Red Cross, ONPRA, Spring Communities, SCI, IRC, Social Action for Development (SAD), Bujumbura Bar Association, UPHWO, TDH, CRS, WVI, Fondation Stamm and PEFE **continued to provide support to refugees with protection needs at Busuma refugee site**. Protection desks handled a total of 155 cases, including requests related to shelter, family reunification, birth registration, voluntary return, and disputes arising from the fixing exercise, which were jointly addressed with ONPRA.

- **Communication with the refugee community was strengthened** during the reporting period, particularly following the decision to allow refugees who wish to return to their areas of origin to do so voluntarily. **A joint communication from the Government of Burundi and UNHCR was shared, informing refugees that those interested in returning should express their intention through registration**. Further information continued to be provided through protection desks and registration activities.

- UNHCR's legal partner, the **Bujumbura Bar Association, provided legal assistance to 66 refugees who had been detained after** leaving the site, most of whom informed that they intended to return to the Democratic Republic of Congo to resume their professional duties.

- During the reporting period, **128 persons with specific needs** including older persons, persons with disabilities, individuals with serious medical conditions, pregnant women, and children at risk **were newly identified and assisted by UNHCR and its protection partner IRC as well as Save the Children**. They were referred to and supported in accessing essential services, including protection, health care, food assistance, shelter, and non-food items. In addition, **IRC conducted home visits to 683 vulnerable individuals to monitor their living conditions, and 485 previously identified persons with specific needs received non-food item kits.**

- **Efforts to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continued**. Newly reported survivors, including rape survivors, received psychosocial support, case management, and referrals to specialized services. Most survivors were women affected by sexual violence, including incidents that occurred in their country of origin, as well as few reported cases near the site. **UNHCR partner, IRC supported GBV survivors with non-food item kits and cash assistance**. In addition, SAD provided comprehensive care services to survivors and CRS through CARITAS provided sanitary towels. Prevention activities were also strengthened through awareness sessions conducted by SAD, Save the Children and World Vision, UPHWO, along with the **distribution of dignity kits to GBV survivors including those provided by UNFPA**.

- During the reporting period, four (4) **Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) awareness and facilitation sessions were conducted**, reaching 247 community volunteers, including 172 health community workers supported by ABUBEF and 75 IRC facilitators at Busuma site. A review of existing prevention and mitigation measures implemented by partners was also conducted and all partners operating at the Busuma site were supported to complete the SEA Risk Control Checklist aimed at preventing and mitigating risks of SEA.

- In collaboration with civil registration authorities from Ruyigi commune, with UNICEF funding through Fondation Stamm, **birth registration services were made available at Busuma site** during the last week of March, where **124 children were registered and issued with birth certificates.**

- As part of child protection efforts, child protection actors including UNHCR, Save the Children, IRC, SAD, Terre des Hommes, UPHWO, PEFE and Spring Communities continued to provide child protection services and safe spaces for children. A total of **255 children at risk, including many unaccompanied children, were identified and assisted**. Interventions included protection interviews, referrals, access to health care, placement in foster families, and psychosocial follow-up. **Since the opening of the site, 142 foster families have been identified, trained, and supported** to provide safe care for vulnerable children. In parallel, 6,353 children (3193 girls and 3160 boys) participated in recreational, creative, educational, socialization activities at the SAD child-friendly space which contributed to their psychosocial well-being and 698 children (389 girls and 309 boys) were supported in the SAD early childhood development centre. 162 children (98 girls and 64 boys) received clothing from SAD.
- On 31 March, the **first session of the Best Interests Determination Panel** was held at the Busuma site, supported by UNICEF/SCI, during which 18 BID reports, spread across 9 cases, were reviewed by the panel members.

Needs and Gaps

- **Late reporting of rape cases** continues to pose a major challenge, as many incidents are disclosed beyond the timeframe needed for timely medical intervention.
- There is an **urgent need for psychological support and counselling** to assist GBV survivors.
- **Protection challenges for separated and unaccompanied children** remain acute.

Food and NFI distribution

- **8,428 refugees from 1816 households received food assistance in March** through distributions led by UNHCR's partner AIRD and CARITAS, with contributions from multiple donors, including the First Lady of Burundi, the Apostolic Nunciature, Magasin IRAKOZE, IRC, the Governor of Buhumuza, CRS and ACT Alliance. In parallel, **WFP provided cash assistance of 38,000 BIF per person for food rations**. The food assistance included beans, rice, cassava flour, oil, porridge flour, maize flour, and salt.
- **3,772 refugees from 870 households received essential non-food items** in March through distributions by UNHCR's partner AIRD and World Vision International. The items provided included, mats, soap, 20-liter buckets, 20-liter jerrycans, mosquito nets and kitchen sets, contributing to improved living conditions and basic hygiene at the site.

Needs and Gaps

- Food security challenges remain a significant concern for the most vulnerable households.

Health & Nutrition

- **18,111 medical consultations were provided** during the reporting period at the Busuma refugee site **through health facilities supported by UNHCR/HealthNet TPO, WHO/GDCB, MSF**, as well as at the **UNFPA/ABUBEF**. The most common conditions treated included diarrheal diseases, reportedly increasing at the site, alongside malaria, respiratory tract infections, and influenza-like syndromes. In addition, **1,596 members of the host community in surrounding areas benefited from these services**, contributing to improved access to essential healthcare beyond the site. To strengthen service delivery, **Save the Children donated medical supplies and equipment** to support the UNHCR/HealthNet TPO mobile clinic.
- **197 safe deliveries were supported** in March by UNHCR's health partner HNTPO, WHO/GDCB and UNFPA/ABUBEF underscoring the continued need for accessible and quality maternal and reproductive health services for refugee women and girls.
- **225 new cases of malnutrition were identified, including 142 cases of severe acute malnutrition**, primarily affecting children. Nutritional screening and treatment services remain ongoing across the site, alongside surveillance for epidemic-prone diseases.
- **1,208 mental health consultations and psychosocial supports were provided** by UNHCR's health partner **HealthNet TPO, MSF** and WHO/GDCB, primarily to women. This reflects significant and ongoing psychosocial support needs among refugee women at Busuma site.

Needs and Gaps

- **Health gaps remain critical.** Shortages of essential medicines, medical and non-medical equipment, and qualified health staff continue to affect the quality and availability of services.
- **Referral hospitals continue to face major challenges**. Both Ruyigi District Hospital and Rema Hospital struggle with limited infrastructure, equipment, essential medicines, and trained staff.

Shelter and Infrastructure/ NFIs

- **As of 31 March, a total of 3,407 tents** were provided and installed by UNHCR and partner COPED since the onset of the emergency. In addition, **814 Refugee Housing Units** (RHUs) have been allocated to refugees. Accommodation is further supported by 38 partitioned communal hangars and 52 non-partitioned communal shelters. Overall, 38% of refugees are hosted in family shelters (tents and RHU).
- A total of **300 family tents were provided by the Burundi Red Cross** during the last week of March to strengthen emergency shelter capacity. Distribution is ongoing in line with protocols, and as of 31 March, 125 tents were allocated to 70 households, representing 639 individuals.

Needs and Gaps

- **Shelter gaps remain critical at the Busuma refugee site. with 62% of refugees without family shelter.**

Energy and Environment

- As of 31 March, only **80 solar streetlights**, provided by UNDP, **are operational at Busuma refugee site. Installation of 34 streetlights by WVI is ongoing**. While these installations contribute to improved safety, night-time visibility, and access to essential services, **large areas of the site remain without lighting, significantly increasing protection risks.**
- **Electrification works in communal hangars continued** throughout March.

Needs and Gaps

- **The lack of proper drainage systems for rainwater and household wastewater has led to the formation of ravines across the site.**
- **Access to cooking fuel remains a critical gap at the Busuma refugee site posing GBV risks.**

WASH

- **In March, access to water at Busuma refugee site continued to be ensured by UNHCR, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Burundi Red Cross**. By March 31st, a total of 15 installed water bladders provided a storage capacity of 381,000 litres per day, representing **approximately 5.71 litres per person per day**. While this reflects a slight improvement, it remains significantly below emergency standards.
- Two boreholes have been drilled at Busuma refugee site, and yield tests were underway during the reporting period. The installation of pumping equipment and the development of a distribution network are still required.
- **WASH actors at Busuma refugee site continued to expand sanitation facilities to respond to urgent needs. Progress toward more durable infrastructure is also underway.** Under CERF funding, UNICEF and COPED have started the construction of 92 durable latrines and 46 showers. The Burundi Red Cross is constructing 36 latrines and 18 showers, while two durable blocks are being constructed by UNDP and one by the Stamm Foundation. These combined efforts contribute to reducing health risks and support the transition from emergency to more sustainable sanitation.

Needs and Gaps

- **Thousands of refugees still lack access to shelters** and live in harsh conditions, posing risks of protection.
- **Water supply remains insufficient** exposing refugees to daily challenges and protection risks.
- **Emergency latrines are insufficient**, which poses GBV and health risks.

With many thanks to :

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