

RWANDA

EMERGENCY UPDATE ON BURUNDIAN INFLUX

01 – 07 April 2015

HIGHLIGHTS

On 31st March 2015, UNHCR was alerted by its Government Counterpart, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR) that Burundians have begun crossing the border into Rwanda to seek protection in different parts of the country. Since then UNHCR has been in daily contact with MIDIMAR to assess the situation and implement measures to manage it.

On April 2nd, the first joint mission to assess Bugesera reception center took place with the Representative of UNHCR in Rwanda, the Permanent Secretary of MIDIMAR, the EU Ambassador, Ambassador of Burundi to Rwanda, the Governor of Eastern Province, Deputy Representative of WFP, WASH expert from UNICEF, members of the Rwandan Red Cross as well as a technical team from UNHCR.



To date, nearly 2,400 Burundians have crossed into Rwanda. The majority are coming from Kirundo Province in northern Burundi, and most of the asylum seekers are women and children. Land has been provided by the Government of Rwanda to establish two reception centers in Nyanza District and in Bugesera District (Gashora Sector). The closeness of these locations to the Burundian border, i.e. less than 3 KM, makes them unsuitable to host the asylum seekers for long-term, and will therefore require a relocation to a more permanent site i.e. a refugee camp.

As of April 6th, MIDIMAR has confirmed the availability of hosting new arrivals in the old Transit Center in Rukomo, close to the already existing Gihembe refugee camp. Rukomo is said to have a capacity to accommodate up to 5,000 individuals but this will be determined in a joint assessment mission to be conducted from April 8-10, which will determine the suitability of the location for a Transit Centre. The mission will also assess the possibility of converting Rukomo into a refugee camp should the asylum seekers remain for long periods in Rwanda after their refugee status has been determined.

Due to the steady increase in numbers, on April 6th the National Disaster Management Executive Committee (NDMEC) has activated the Contingency Plan to respond to the emergency. Coordination and implementation of assistance programmes are being firmed up between the One UN and the Government of Rwanda.

KEY FIGURES

2,341 (as of 7 April)

Burundian Asylum Seekers have crossed into Rwanda.

Further breakdown of the above figure:

1,745

Asylum seekers in Bugesera Reception Center.

595

Asylum seekers in Nyanza Reception Center.

1,400

Of the new arrivals Are children.

PRIORITIES

- Provide food and non-food items to all asylum seekers;
- Conduct biometric registration of all individuals;
- Erect hangars in both transit centers and provide tents to vulnerable asylum seekers;
- Provide the asylum seekers with adequate WASH facilities in both locations
- Conduct medical screenings to determine appropriate assistance;
- Designate psychosocial staff to assist vulnerable asylum seekers, especially unaccompanied minors;
- Conduct an assessment of Rukomo to develop it into a Transit Center.

In addition to numerous meetings between partners and the joint missions to both Bugesera and Nyanza transit centers, Rwanda hosted a ministerial delegation from Burundi whose aim was to sensitize the newly arrived asylum seekers from Burundi to return home (*see reports and recommendations page 2-4*).

UPDATE ON SITE VISITS

Bugesera Reception Center

Bugesera has structures currently hosting the majority of Burundian asylum seekers in the country. However, due to its closeness to the border and the inadequacy of the structures, it will only serve as a reception center where (Persons of Concern) PoCs will be registered and stay for a limited time before being transferred to Rukomo Transit Centre.



Asylum seeker in Nyanza transit center. @UNHCR/K. Loupeidou

Nyanza Reception Center

Asylum seekers are currently residing in a school (*see photo above*), but due to the increase in numbers and limited space, the site is quickly becoming overcrowded.

Recommendations

The need to use the facilities at Bugesera and Nyanza, strictly for reception purposes, was underscored so as not to invest in permanent and expensive structures in the transit centers. The following observations and recommendations have been made:

- **Food:** WFP has been providing high energy biscuits for 4 days which will continue with hot meals prepared from dry ration (to be provided by WFP) for the asylum seekers with effect from 8th April 2015. UNHCR has engaged its partner, ADRA, to set up the communal kitchens to provide the hot meals.
- **Shelter:** UNHCR is prepositioning emergency tents at both locations as the current facilities are inadequate to cope with the increasing number of refugees. Additionally, MIDIMAR, together with the district authorities, will construct immediately hangars in both locations, to serve as temporary shelters for the increasing numbers of asylum seekers.
- **WASH & Sanitation:** Mobile latrines have been deployed to both transit centers to enhance sanitation. PAJER has committed to deploy personnel immediately to the two locations. UNICEF has deployed a WASH expert and items including water bladders, mobile latrines, and is also allocating tents suitable for installation and use as health posts in the reception centers.
- **Health:** Health screening needs to be undertaken immediately. UNHCR is liaising with the district health authorities and AHA to make an in-depth assessment and deploy some nurses and provide basic essential drugs immediately.

- **Registration:** From April 8th, UNHCR, MIDIMAR and Immigration will start biometric registration in order to avoid a backlog that will be difficult to deal with as the rate of influx increases.
- **Non-food items (NFIs):** UNHCR has begun distributing core relief items such as sleeping mats, blankets, jerry cans and soap.

Ministerial Delegation from Burundi visits Bugesera Reception Center



Hon. Minister of MIDIMAR greeting asylum seekers in Bugesera transit center @UNHCR/E. Fitzpatrick

On April 4th, the Government of Rwanda received a ministerial delegation from Burundi whose aim was to sensitize the newly arrived asylum seekers to return home. UNHCR participated as an observer in the opening meeting between the two delegations.

The Burundian delegation was composed of the following: Hon. Edouard Nduwimana, Minister of Interior (leader of the delegation); Hon. Godelieve Nininahazwe, Minister of Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender; The Governor of the Kirundo Province; Military Commander of the Northern Region (Muyinga, Karuzi, Kirundo), Procureur General Kirundo, three mayors and neighbours of the Burundian asylum seekers in Rwanda

The Government of Rwanda was led by the Hon. Mukantabana Seraphine, Minister of MIDIMAR. Other members included: Hon. Mukabaramba Alivera, Minister of State at Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) in charge of Social Affairs and Community Development, Mr. Jean Marie Mokombe, Executive Secretary of the Eastern Province, Mr. Eugene Ngoga, Director for Africa (MINAFFET)) and Mr. Isaie Bagabo, Director of Protocol a.i at MINAFFET.

UNHCR was led by the Deputy Representative, Mr. Matthew Crentsil, who was accompanied by the Snr. Protection Officer, the Snr. Programme Officer, the Public Health Officer, Programme and Protection Officers and PI Officer.

After a brief meeting with the Burundian delegation in the presence of UNHCR, a meeting was held with the asylum seekers.

The Minister of MIDIMAR opened the meeting by reiterating that Rwanda, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention will honour its obligations and that the asylum seekers will not be forced by the Rwandan Government to return to Burundi. She assured them that the decision to return home is entirely theirs. She

stated that before giving the floor to the Burundian delegation it would be better to listen to the grievances of the asylum seekers first.

Five members among the asylum seekers took the floor and recounted their own experiences, stating the harassment of militias from the ruling party, meted upon others members of the society who were not members of the ruling party. They said they had fled due to the prolonged harassment and that they were unwilling to return home. One of them recounted his forced recruitment into the militias and how he had to flee from it. The asylum seekers stated that there were no ethnic tensions in Burundi and that the conflict was along political party lines.



The Burundian Minister of Interior stated that the stories recounted by the asylum seekers were exaggerated and their fears are a result of media propaganda. He urged the asylum seekers to return home as life in exile could be difficult. He stated that Burundi is also a signatory to the International Refugee Convention and respects the provisions therein. Therefore, he was only appealing to the asylum seekers to return home, stating that their presence was necessary to cast their votes in the upcoming elections.

On the part of UNHCR, the Deputy Representative acknowledged, with thanks, Rwanda's assurance not to forcibly return any asylum seekers to Burundi and urged the asylum seekers not to feel pressurized to return home, stressing that the decision to return home is entirely theirs. He also stated that whenever they were convinced that the reasons that led to their flight from Burundi were no longer there, and they decide to return home, UNHCR will assist them to go back. Whilst the Government has assured the asylum seekers of respect of their rights, the Deputy Representative of UNHCR also reminded the asylum seekers of their responsibilities to be law abiding in Rwanda.

In the end, the asylum seekers insisted that they had valid reasons to fear to return home and have decided to stay in Rwanda. Meanwhile, the number of newly arrived asylum seekers continues to increase steadily.

Thanks to our partners:



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