

Burundi

March 2024

In March 2024, **1,773 individuals, consisting of 696 women and 1,077 men, were voluntarily repatriated** from Tanzania back to their home country of Burundi. This year, men represented 60% of the returnees, which differed from previous years.

Additionally, **464 refugees, many of whom had been in a protracted refugee situation, were resettled** in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Furthermore, **7,174 refugee households received assistance including food, soap, and briquettes.** However, while this aid addressed some needs, it only fulfilled 70% of the necessary support, thus remaining insufficient.

Operational Context

As of March 2024, the security situation in Burundi was generally calm, albeit marred by various incidents of criminality across several provinces. These incidents, however, did not affect UNHCR's activities within the country.

Economically, the persistent shortage of essential fuels like diesel and gasoline continued to pose a significant problem, particularly in the capital, Bujumbura, and other provinces. This scarcity of fuel has led to increased food and transport costs.



Arrival of a convoy of Burundian refugees who chose voluntary repatriation @UNHCR/Burundi

Update On Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- **927 refugee identity cards were distributed** by UNHCR and ONPRA in Musasa refugee camp in Muyinga Province.
- **276 persons of Congolese nationality were recognized as refugees** during sessions of the *Advisory Commission for Foreigners and Refugees (CCER)* together with ONPRA and UNHCR.
- In March, UNHCR and partner IRC carried out prevention activities to fight gender-based violence and responded to VBG outbreaks in refugee camps. **UNHCR partner IRC identified and documented 46 VBG cases, among them children and persons living with disability.** GBV cases are mainly committed by refugees themselves, either a family member, a known and unknown person to the survivor. Survivors received psychosocial support and medical care and, when necessary, cases were referred to the government partner ONPRA to find shelters for survivors as a security solution.
- In March, **415 newborn babies were registered to obtain birth certificates** in the Bwagiriza, Kavumu and Nyankanda refugee camps in Ruyigi Province, and Kinama and Musasa refugee camps in Makamba Province. As of March 31st, a total of **55 783 refugees (10 149 households) lives in the 5 refugees camps** in the North, South and East of Burundi.
- To mark International Women's Day, 40 urban refugees as well as UNHCR Bujumbura staff and partners participated in the official ceremony in Gitega Province under the patronage of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Burundi. In addition, UNHCR in Ruyigi Province and the Bujumbura Bar Association conducted various activities including a **training session on women's rights for 60 women leaders** in Bwagiriza, Nyankanda and Kavumu refugee camps located in the east of Burundi. Participants discussed women's rights and problems faced by women in the community, which prevent their rights from being respected and valued.
- **307 refugees (75 in Bujumbura and 232 refugees from Bwagiriza, Kavumu and Nyankanda camps in Ruyigi province and Musasa and Kinama camps in Muyinga Province were advised on various cases and referred to the appropriate services when needed** during this reporting period. Their inquiries and requests concerned, among other things; documents (ration cards and proof of registration), inquiries on the progress of resettlement files, requests for reunification/separation, or for security and health issues, as well as inquiries to follow up on asylum application files.
- As of 31st of March 2024, **464 refugees most of whom have been living in a protracted refugee situation, were resettled in the United States, Canada, and Australia.** Having fled war and

atrocities in their country of origin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, they have spent more than 5 years in refugee camps, and few were able to maintain a very fragile living condition in urban areas in Burundi. UNHCR Burundi is diligently working to find durable solutions for refugees, and resettlement is one of the durable solutions that put an end to refugee problems.



EDUCATION

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- In March, UNHCR partner Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix (CEJP) assisted by members of voluntary community structures committed to justice and peace conducted protection monitoring activities of Burundian returnees in areas of return (Gisagara, and Mishiha -Cankuzo Province; Bugabira and Murore in Kirundo Province, Giteranyi / Muyinga Province). Focus group discussions with returnees revealed that **repatriated children find it difficult to adapt to the Burundian school system**, as they have studied in the English-speaking system mainly in Uganda and Rwanda. **57% returnee children are registered in school in March 2024**. In addition, parents lack funds to buy uniforms for their children. In addition, the schools have neither sufficient teaching materials and equipment nor teaching staff which compromises reintegration in the education system. Some initiatives are implemented by other humanitarian actors on catch-up classes, classroom building, school canteen, kit distribution to support households and students maintaining attendance to school.



HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- In March, refugees were also affected by the **upsurge in viral conjunctivitis, with 62 cases recorded in refugee camps** mainly in Ruyigi Province. However, by the end of the month the number of cases continued to fall significantly in refugee camps as the result of awareness-raising campaigns on preventive measures, particularly hand hygiene.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- One of the main gaps in terms of health is that all **Health centers in refugee camps in Burundi have neither psychiatrists nor psychologists** and the refugee population who fled conflicts and war experienced some of the most horrific situations and refugees are in strongly in need of those specialists.
- **Mental health problems were also highlighted by returnees** during protection monitoring activities in areas of return as one significant issue faced by returnees as they lack adequate care to overcome mental health problems suffered by many during their escape and the period of exile.

**FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION****Achievements and Impact**

- In March, **7174 refugee households in the Bwagiriza, Nyankanda and Kavumu camps in Ruyigi province received assistance** in food, soap and briquettes distributed by WFP and UNHCR partners. Each refugee received a ratio of 4.5 kg of rice, 300 g of oil, 150 g of salt and 17,500 Burundian Francs to cover one month's needs. Although this assistance helps to cover the needs of refugees living in camps, it only covers 70% and remain insufficient.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- In addition, **there is a risk of food shortages, as WFP announced a reduction in food assistance to refugees and returnees** due to a reduction of financial resources. Livelihood projects, particularly for refugees, are strongly needed to remedy on a long term, the reduction in food assistance among other things.

**SHELTER AND NFIS****Achievements and Impact**

- Construction works at the Nyabitare Refugee Transit Center in Ruyigi Province are progressing. Infrastructures namely 3 sheds for temporary accommodation, a registration room, a refectory, and a kitchen were built using durable materials. The Transit Center will soon accommodate the repatriation convoy for returnees from Tanzania.
- In March, **UNHCR and its partners finalized the construction of the Kigamba Hospital in Cankuzo Province**. The hospital will be officially inaugurated and handed to local authorities. The UNHCR funded hospital has 19 infrastructures including an administrative block, hospitalization blocks, maternity, laboratory, incinerators, stocks, morgue and more. **The Kigamba hospital will provide refugees, returnees, and the local population with access to modern healthcare**, previously unavailable in Cankuzo Province.
- Construction works are underway at the Gasana primary school in Kayogoro commune, in Ngozi Province. **The school will provide a better environment and learning conditions for returnee children and those of the host communities** of Kayogoro and its surroundings. Kayogoro is one of Burundi's communes with the highest number of returnees. UNHCR Burundi and the partner COPED are facing delays due to challenges caused mainly by the rainy season which degraded roads thus slowing down the supply of building materials.



- During this reporting period of March, **UNHCR and partners continued the construction work at the Burundi's very first refugee site** located in Giharo in Rutana Province. The first neighborhood of 48 houses at the Giharo refugee site is completed as well as 4 latrine blocks and 4 showers blocks. UNHCR and the construction partner COPED completed the construction of **the water source, which is less than 50 meters from the site and will benefit refugees and members of the host community to access clean water**. In addition, a primary school is under construction to strengthen the existing primary school's capacity. **Refugee children and those of the host community will be able to study together in better learning conditions**. The Giharo refugee site will soon be officially inaugurated in collaboration with national authorities.
- UNHCR and partners visited two elementary schools namely Kizuka and Mutambara where the two IDEAs Cubes libraries were built for refugees, returnees, and host communities. Bibliothèque sans frontières (BSF) known as *Librairies Without Borders* provided various equipment articles to support the libraries and the 4 clubs namely the language club, health club, nutrition club and sport and culture club. In addition, BSF has provided capacity-building for 10 teachers.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF RELIANCE

Achievements and Impact

- In March, as part of efforts to strengthen refugees' livelihoods, **320 refugees and members of the local community (160 men and 160 women) in 16 cooperatives received a training in business planning** and, 15 cooperatives operating in various activities were supported in setting up including 8 in Bwagiriza, 6 in Kavumu and 1 in Nyankanda in Ruyigi Province. Those activities aim to equip and guide members of the cooperatives to make their businesses profitable and better meet their needs.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Achievements and Impact

In March **1773 persons**; 696 women (including 371 girls) 1077 men (including 362 boys) **were voluntary repatriated to their country-of-origin Burundi** from Tanzania and 7 persons repatriated from Mozambique. Unlike the previous years, men are starting to make up most of the returnees, with a rate of 60% compared to 49% since 2017. All returnees were welcomed in safety and dignity at the transit centers in Gitara Makamba province and Gihanga in Bubanza



Province where **they received certificates of recognition of their repatriation status** issued by the government namely the *Direction Générale du Rapatriement, de la Réintégration et de la Réinsertion* (DGRRR) as well as their return package in cash assistance to meet a variety of needs in their areas of return.

Upon presentation of the certificate of repatriation, **administrative documents are issued free of charge to returnees by civil registry offices in their areas of return**. Returnees were welcomed and taken care of by UNHCR and partners and were provided with adequate legal services (18 cases



related to land issues) and medical care (337persons). **61 most vulnerable returnees received dignity kits** composed of blankets, soaps, and hoes to cultivate. 15 unaccompanied children received school and assistance kits composed of notebooks, pens, clothes, soaps, and shoes. In addition, **120 shelter kits were distributed with an addition cash assistance** to cover carpentry work. Most returnees indicated that they chose voluntary repatriation for security reasons, for family reunifications and to start a new life in their country of origin. The increase of the return package assistance has also encouraged voluntary return.

The voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin is a durable solution that ends forced displacement. To ensure that the voluntary return of returnees is sustainable, UNHCR Burundi works with humanitarian and development actors to find funds for reintegration projects that are needed to improve socio-economic reintegration.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- During this reporting period, **47 children arrived in repatriation convoys from Tanzania without required documentation** as their mothers were refugees and their fathers are Tanzanians. The team in Makamba office carried out rapid assessments of these cases based on interviews and multiple consultations with Tanzania led to the initiation of joint efforts to prevent these children from being at risk of statelessness. Actions are underway.
- 170 repatriated children under the age of 5 who were screened for malnutrition were unable to receive porridge supplements with their mothers during their stay at the transit centers, as UNHCR partner Healthnet TPO is out of stock.

Contacts

Brigitte Mukanga-Eno, UNHCR Representative, eno@unhcr.org, UNHCR Bujumbura Representation / **Aline Irakarama**, Associate Reporting Officer, irakaram@unhcr.org, UNHCR Bujumbura Representation