

BURUNDI - Joint Regional Refugee Response Plan 2021 update



Burundian refugee Venancia sits with her youngest daughter outside her home in Nduta refugee camp, Tanzania. © DRC/Christina John

CONTEXT

UNHCR and partners have been facilitating the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees since 2017, resulting in assistance to over 183,000 returnees as of the end of November 2021. Following the presidential elections in Burundi in May 2020, an increasing number of Burundian refugees expressed interest in voluntary return. In 2021, UNHCR has supported the voluntary repatriation of nearly 64,000 Burundian refugees, coming from various countries in the region, mainly from Tanzania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

To coordinate the return and reintegration of Burundian refugees and mobilize much needed resources, the 2021 [Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan \(JRRRP\)](#) was developed with Burundian authorities, UNHCR, UNDP, other UN agencies and NGO partners. The JRRRP stems from a strong commitment by Burundian authorities and humanitarian and development partners to promote sustainable solutions for returning refugees, in a manner that enables them to rebuild their lives in dignity and in peace. The plan, endorsed by the Government, operationalizes the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, bringing together humanitarian, development and peace actors to support voluntary repatriation, as well as enhance the resilience of returnees and host communities to ensure sustainability of reintegration.

While returnees are generally being welcomed back by the Government of Burundi and their communities of origin without incident, monitoring indicates that many refugee returnees face considerable reintegration challenges. Additional funding is crucial to intensify monitoring of returnees' situation in fragile return areas and promote sustainable integration, including through support to host communities and improvement of infrastructure.

2021 RESPONSE IN NUMBERS

183,000

BURUNDIAN REFUGEES ASSISTED TO VOLUNTARILY RETURN AS OF 30 NOVEMBER 2021

USD 22.1 M

FUNDING RECEIVED BY SEPT 2021, 21 % OF REQUIREMENTS

64,000

BURUNDIAN REFUGEES ASSISTED TO VOLUNTARILY RETURN IN 2021 AS OF 30 NOVEMBER 2021

20

UN, INTERNATIONAL NGO AND NATIONAL NGO PARTNERS INVOLVED



2021 ACHIEVEMENTS



100%

Identified **GBV survivors** received appropriate support



100%

Returnees Head of Household provided with the **administrative certificate of return** issued by authorities



1,000

Construction kits distributed in 6 largest communes hosting returnees



590+

Covid cases were detected and referred for treatment to the Ministry of Health



62,710

Burundian returnees received food and cash assistance in 2021



100%

Returnees **received a mobile money cash grant** (\$150 per Adult, \$75 per Child)



450+

Repatriation convoys were organized **since September 2017**



1,200

Reception **capacity of the new transit center** constructed in Gihanga



1,788

Households received **agriculture inputs and tools**

The importance of providing support to reintegration in countries of origin is clearly articulated in the Global Compact on Refugees which notes that *“States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to support countries of origin upon their request with respect to social, political, economic and legal capacity to receive and reintegrate returnees, notably women, youth, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. This may include support for development, livelihood and economic opportunities and measures to address housing, land and property issues.”*

The COVID-19 pandemic presented serious challenges to the implementation of the JRRRP in an already complex operational environment. The pandemic severely impacted the pace of the convoys, the repatriation process and the socio-economic reintegration of returnees. There were 597 COVID-19 cases detected among refugee returnees in 2021.

LINKING HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT TO REINTEGRATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The continued voluntary repatriation of significant numbers of refugees could lead to further pressures on already fragile communities in the absence of inadequate support for reintegration and investment to strengthen development in the marginalized and impoverished return areas. Specific measures are needed to avoid further forced displacement on return (internal or cross-border). Returnee monitoring undertaken by UNHCR indicates that over 30% of the returnees could not be found within their area of return 6 months after their repatriation. According to the monitoring analysis, most of these secondary movements took place within Burundi, as the returnees move to other provinces in search of better economic opportunities.

A core objective of the JRRRP is therefore to assist displacement-affected communities by strengthening their absorption capacity, collective resilience, and boosting socio-economic recovery and development. In this way reintegration can be durable and beneficial for the entire population. UNDP and development partners have committed to develop an inclusive approach to better target returnees and host communities with the aim to further local economic development (including introducing e-commerce and e-governance innovative digital solutions), socio-economic empowerment of women, Disaster Risk Reduction, access to vocational trainings or financial/non-financial services. It is important that medium and longer-term development efforts be intensified to complement humanitarian assistance upon return, not only for the sake of the returnees but also to sustain and rebuild the communities to which they are returning.

2021 ACHIEVEMENTS



1,599

Households received **land certificates** to secure their property



16,160

Women are targeted for **economic empowerment activities**



1,440

Families were **assisted to improve socio-economic resilience** through the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender



1,787

Returnees were **supported** with the combination of **financial and non-financial assets** to rebuild their livelihoods



1,024

People were **sensitized on Housing, Land, and Property issues**



53,084

Children (27,938 girls and 25,146 boys) **received school materials**



5,111

Returnees children (2,560 girls / 2,551 boys) **attended catch-up classes and returned** to school



A harmonized **marriage and birth registration system** was introduced

The JRRRP supports a whole of government approach.

As such, JRRRP partners seek to collaborate closely with communal-level, provincial and national authorities and relevant line ministries of health, education, social welfare and human rights and others. The JRRRP identifies key activities in support of delivering basic services, providing protection services and rebuilding livelihoods. The 2022 JRRRP is currently being developed, in collaboration with the Government of Burundi, UNHCR, UNDP and other stakeholders.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAPS

The JRRRP has contributed to improved coordination with government and among humanitarian and development partners in providing a continuum of support from the moment of repatriation to longer-term reintegration and local development in the main areas of return. It has been a useful framework to raise awareness among partners and donors on the importance of ensuring that the ongoing return process is providing a truly durable solution to those that opt to repatriate and contributes to broader peace building efforts in Burundi. However, more resources are required to meet humanitarian needs as well as longer-term objectives centered on preparing refugees to return to their countries of origin, supporting returnees to reintegrate, contributing to local development and building social cohesion and peace. **While the overall funding for the JRRRP stands at 21%, financing for the reintegration component currently stands at 18.6%.**

Repatriation: Meeting immediate needs while preparing for reintegration

JRRRP partners continued to improve infrastructure in the transit centers, for the reception of returnees and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the transit centers, all Burundian returnees were registered. In addition, all spontaneous returnees who presented themselves at the transit centres or at the offices of the General Office of Return, Repatriation and Reintegration received a certificate of recognition of their status; this document facilitates the acquisition of other civil status documents.

Refugee returnees were provided with a three months' supply of food assistance before their departure from reception/transit centers. In addition, UNHCR used cash-based interventions as a modality to provide additional assistance to the returnees. All refugees who returned in 2021 were provided with mobile money accounts and received cash grant.

JRRRP partners played an essential role in coordinating prevention and response to the pandemic in the transit centers and during the repatriation movements. The construction of temporary facilities to provide treatment to returnees who tested positive for COVID-19 was a key achievement. Other activities included: construction of a

GAPS AND CHALLENGES



38%

Head of households **possess national ID card**



52%

Repatriated children do **not have a birth certificate**



59%

Returnees could **not access housing upon return**



37%

Returnees households have **access to shelter** upon return



53%

Returnees **children do not attend school**



71%

Communes have **insufficient health infrastructures**



57%

Returnees reported **eating only one meal a day**



97%

School infrastructure are in **bad condition**



83%

Households reported being **dissatisfied** with their **level of food security**



43%



Population aged between 17 - 60 are **not employed after their return**



63%

Returnees **women do not have access to land**

COVID-19 center in the province of Cankuzo; material and training support to government health facilities; extensive awareness and training for health workers; and enhancement of community-based surveillance in the transit centers.

Protection

Humanitarian partners put remote management systems in place to streamline activities and increase efforts to strengthen community-based protection by empowering and sensitizing returnees. Protection interventions were also enhanced through strengthened complaints and referral mechanisms, an improved child protection system, intensified GBV prevention and response, a comprehensive remote case management and community-based approaches. Volunteers and partners coordinated with authorities at the community level and supported protection referrals of urgent cases. The delivery of essential protection services, such as case management, GBV prevention and protection of GBV survivors, dignity kits distribution remains of critical importance.

Documentation

Despite ongoing advocacy, access to civil documentation and justice for returnees is challenging due to the weak infrastructure and limited capacity of formal and informal justice mechanisms in Burundi. A harmonized marriage and birth registration system was introduced, while advocacy continued for access to birth and marriage registration in order to mitigate protection risks. Key priorities include reinforcing returnees' access to civil documentation, legal assistance and advocating for effective interventions by law enforcement agencies and strengthening community-based approaches to documentation and justice, such as community protection and safety initiatives. Training for government officials on birth and civil registration remains a key priority.

Reintegration: Strengthening resilience and development

Coordination mechanisms and mappings set up in 2021 have improved visibility and understanding of the reintegration efforts, allowing for a more strategic and coherent partnership and resource mobilization strategy. JRRRP partners supported access of returnees to essential services such as housing, education, social welfare, electricity and energy, and water and sanitation.

However, with continued large numbers of refugees returning voluntarily to Burundi, the Government of Burundi and JRRRP partners are concerned about the resource gaps in support to reintegration and broader development in the main areas of return. 106,349 returnees out of a total of 263,384 targeted individuals received reintegration assistance. Under the current conditions, the absorption capacity of the return areas is very limited, and the investment towards sustainable reintegration has been insufficient. Critical gaps remain in all areas, including access to adequate housing, education and health services, livelihood support and social cohesion.

Access to Housing, Land and Property

While many families opted to utilize the cash-assistance to purchase or rent a piece of land, serious gaps and challenges remain for refugees to access housing and/or land. Another issue relating to household shelter is the limited supply of renewable construction materials, which considerably impacts the environment. In 2021, 1,000 construction kits were distributed in six of the largest communes hosting returnees, 1,599 households received land certificates to secure their property and 1,024 people were sensitized on Housing, Land, and Property issues through 12 community dialogues organized in 12 communes of Muyinga, Ruyigi and Cankuzo provinces. JRRRP partners assisted with rental subsidies, logistical support to national and communal land services, provision of shelter repair kits, and ecological latrines for returnees and host community members.

Access to basic services

Funding shortfalls, poor school infrastructure in Burundi, the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures in some asylum countries resulted in loss of learning and increased protection risks, with girls disproportionately affected. Differences in the education systems provided in the countries of asylum causes many children to drop out of school, because of educational challenges as well as administrative hurdles whereby the school authorities ask Burundian returnee students to go back two or even three grades in order to take state examinations at both primary and secondary levels. JRRRP partners provided targeted support to returnee children to attend catch up classes and have been supporting students with education materials. Advocacy to address challenges related to examination recognition and class placement is continuing.

Substantial numbers of returnees may put additional pressure on already weak health systems in the main areas of return. JRRRP partners endeavor to support health care systems servicing the entire community as well as capacitating them to provide specific services, including psycho-social services, to meet the needs of returnees. Among health interventions, 2500 young people (1500 women / 1000 men) were trained and sensitized on reproductive health, prevention of violence. JRRRP partners trained 167 individuals on COVID-19 preparedness and response plans; 120,958 people were sensitized, and 50 community health workers and health staff were trained on Psychological First Aid.

Rebuilding livelihoods

The need to scale-up livelihoods skills and vocational courses for returnees, including for youth, remains a priority. Diversified skills development is needed to increase livelihoods, production and engagement with areas of return and local markets in a situation where access to land is a particularly challenging. While 94% of returnees depend on agriculture as their main source of income, only 37% of returnee women have access to land. JRRRP partners, working closely with national and local government authorities, are seeking to expand area-based support approaches to rebuild livelihoods, promote local development and ensure peaceful cohesion.

Social cohesion

JRRRP partners worked closely with government and local organizations to promote peaceful co-existence between returnees and host communities. Trainings and sensitization workshops were organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, Public Security and Community Development. 5,500 beneficiaries participated in discussions on social cohesion among other topics.

2021 JRRRP partners

The 2021 JRRRP brings together some 20 partners in Burundi and includes Government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs, notably the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Gender, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, UN Women, WFP, WHO, UNAIDS, IOM, CARE, DRC, IRC, JRS and Welthunger Hilfe. The Director General for Repatriation, Reintegration and Reinstallation of the Ministry of Interior manages the coordination of refugee returns with the support of UNDP (as the lead for reintegration) and UNHCR (as the lead for repatriation) and the other JRRRP partners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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