BURUNDI

European Union Commissioner Hadja Lahbib during her visit at the Cishemere refugee transit center, Burundi.

Hignlights

- **UNHCR commends the Government of Burundi for its leadership, steadfast engagement and solidarity following the emergency influx of over 101,000 people in December 2025**, enabling protection, access to land, and the rapid delivery of life-saving assistance at the Busuma refugee site. **UNHCR also recognizes the critical support of the UN Resident Coordinator** in driving coordination, advocacy, and resource mobilization, **alongside the commitment of UN agencies, and humanitarian partners**, whose collective efforts **have significantly strengthened and continue to enhance the response** to newly arrived refugees.
- **As of 28 February, 66,727 newly arrived refugees, representing 14,061 households, were hosted at the site** in Ruyigi in Buhumuza Province. **Children account for 59 per cent** of the population, underscoring significant protection concerns and needs
- **On 23 February, Burundi reopened the Gatumba–Kavimvira land border with the Democratic Republic of Congo.** This development has raised expectations among some refugees regarding potential return. In collaboration with the Government of Burundi, UNHCR protection teams regularly undertake joint cross-border assessments to monitor the situation and keep refugees informed. A joint communiqué issued by the Government and UNHCR encourages refugees to wait, emphasizing that any return must remain voluntary, informed and based on free choice.
- **9,913 refugees remain in overcrowded transit centres,** in Cishemere Transit Centre (8,132 people) and Makombe Transit Centre (1,781 people) Urgent support is needed to provide safer shelter, adequate food assistance, and essential services, particularly for the most vulnerable..

Protection

- In February, **protection activities at the Busuma refugee site continued to expand to support refugees with heightened protection needs**. Protection desks are operational across the site to provide information, guidance, referrals and case management for individuals at risk. Attention is given to vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied and separated children, older persons, persons with disabilities and households that were not registered during the "fixing" exercise.

- **UNHCR and ONPRA prepared and distributed new household tokens to refugees in Busuma refugee site, indicating family names and household size**. These tokens serve as a temporary identification tool pending Level 2 registration, helping to facilitate fair access to food distributions, non-food items, and essential services, while strengthening accountability and assistance planning.

- In February, p**rotection desks at the Busuma refugee site handled 138 protection-related cases**, many linked to the fixing exercise, including requests to add newborns and cases of individuals absent during verification who later presented medical documentation. During the same period, **113 protection counselling sessions addressed** requests related to shelter and basic assistance, registration and documentation issues, corrections to household tokens, transfers to refugee camps, and family reunification. The cases involved people with specific needs, including unaccompanied and separated children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, who continue to receive targeted support.

- **The Bujumbura Bar Association, UNHCR's legal partner, continued to provide legal assistance** and assisted 108 refugees who were detained for illegally leaving the site. However, due to limited funding, the partner intervenes twice a week at the site. In parallel, **legal awareness activities are being carried out**. On 23 and 24 February, two sensitization sessions were organized for adolescents attending child-friendly spaces supported by SAD, Terre des Hommes, and Spring Communities, focusing on common offenses committed in surrounding communities and promoting peaceful coexistence.

- Between 16 and17 February, 48 police officers including 4 women assigned to Busuma refugee site received training on human rights, refugee protection, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, code of conduct, camp security, use of force, and crowd management. The sessions, organized jointly by UNHCR and ONPRA with partners SCI, the Bar Association, SAD, and IRC, strengthened operational capacity and awareness of the sensitivities involved in protecting a population that includes former combatants.

- On 12–14 February, **260 protection community mobilisers in Busuma site received training on rights and duties of refugee, international protection, accountability to affected people**, GBV, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, code of conduct. The sessions, organized jointly by UNHCR, CRS, WVI and with partners ONPRA, SCI, SAD, and IRC, which strengthened identification and referral of protection cases to relevant services.

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- **472 persons with specific needs were identified and assisted** by UNHCR partner IRC and Save the Children identified during the reporting period at the Busuma refugee site, including older persons, individuals with serious medical conditions, persons living with disabilities (hearing, physical and psychosocial), pregnant women, and children at risk. They were referred and accompanied to essential services such as protection case management, health care, food assistance, shelter and non-food items. This support helps ensure safe and dignified access to assistance for the most vulnerable refugees.
- In February, efforts to prevent and respond to GBV were further strengthened by protection partners; including UNHCR, UNFPA, ABUBEF, IRC, Save the Children, SAD, ONPRA and the Barreau de Bujumbura. **A GBV safety audit was undertaken to identify protection risks for women and girls** across the site. At the same time, the rollout of the GBV Information Management System took place to strengthen safe data collection, case management and survivor-centred referral pathways. **Accountability and community feedback mechanisms were also established** with the support of UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP, IRC, SCI, CRB and CRS to ensure refugees can safely raise concerns and access appropriate support.
- GBV survivors at the Busuma refugee site received protection and support services from UNHCR, UNFPA, WHO, and partners, including IRC, SCI, SAD, and Terre des Hommes. Services provided included confidential case management, psychosocial support, and referrals to specialized health and protection services. Most survivors were women affected by sexual violence, including cases of rape that occurred in their country of origin. In addition, survivors participated in a group therapy session and received dignity kits provided by UNFPA, supporting their recovery and psychosocial well-being.
- **555 women and adolescent girls including adolescents with disabilities and unaccompanied or separated children received dignity kits** through SAD, with support from Fondation Bonne Action Umugiraneza, ADRA Burundi and World Vision. Prevention efforts were reinforced through PSEA awareness sessions conducted by UNHCR for 172 ABUBEF community health volunteers, helping to strengthen protection and accountability mechanisms for refugees.
- **Child-friendly spaces continued to provide safe environments where children can access psychosocial support, recreational activities and protection services**. These spaces also enable the identification and referral of vulnerable children with support from UNHCR, UNICEF, SAD, Spring Communities, and Terre des Hommes.
- **355 children at risk were identified during the reporting period at the Busuma refugee site**, including a significant number of separated and unaccompanied children. Child protection partners including UNHCR, IRC, SCI, SAD, CRB, UPHWO, Spring Communities and Terre des Hommes conducted protection interviews, referrals and psychosocial follow-up to address their immediate needs. Many of the children identified showed signs of malnutrition and were referred to the medical partners HealthNet TPO, Global Community and MSF for follow up and needed assistance.

- **Family tracing and reunification efforts continued for unaccompanied children**. During the reporting period, **19 children were reunified with their families or relatives, while 101 unaccompanied children placed in spontaneous foster families received regular home visits** by SAD to ensure their safety and best interests. They also received food and dignity kits.
- On 13 February, UNICEF/Spring Communities organized a sports and educational tournament at the Busuma refugee site as part of its child protection and prevention programme for refugee and vulnerable children. The event brought together youth aged 12–17, promoting psychosocial well-being, social cohesion, and reducing isolation among children. The initiative created a safe and inclusive space for young people to engage in positive activities and strengthen connections across the site.

Needs and Gaps

- **Refugees who are hearing-impaired or deaf-mute continue to face significant barriers** to accessing services.
- 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 a strong and urgent need for psychological support and counselling to assist survivors of GBV. Many survivors face significant trauma and distress.
- Protection challenges for separated and unaccompanied childrenremain acute.
- **Family tracing and reunification efforts face significant constraints.**

Children playing basketball at the child-friendly area, picture © SAD

Health & Nutrition

- **22,687 medical consultations were provided** during the reporting period at the Busuma refugee site **through UNHCR and WHO supported mobile clinics** as well as at the MSF health facility. Consultations for the host community represent 10 per cent. The most common illnesses treated included upper respiratory tract infections, non-cholera diarrhoea, influenza-like syndromes and malaria. Host community members in surrounding areas also benefited from these consultations, contributing to strengthened access to essential health services.
- **138 safe deliveries were supported** in February by UNHCR's health partners, including WHO/GDCB and UNFPA/ABUBEF contributing to a total of 403 births. This underscores the continued need for accessible and quality maternal and reproductive health services for refugee women and girls.
- **2,565 cases of malnutrition were identified, including 523 cases of severe acute malnutrition**, primarily affecting children. Nutritional screening and treatment services continue across the site, alongside surveillance for epidemic-prone diseases.
- **539 mental health consultations were provided** by UNHCR's health partners and GDCB/WHO, primarily to women. This highlights significant psychosocial support needs among the refugee population and underscores the importance of continued mental health interventions.
- **319 community health workers were trained** during the reporting period to support health promotion, early identification of health risks, and referrals within the refugee community at the Busuma site. Of these, 119 were trained by the Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with UNICEF and GDCB, while 200 were trained by ABUBEF. These community health workers play a key role in raising awareness, supporting disease prevention, and facilitating access to health services for refugees.

Needs and Gaps

- **Health system gaps remain critical** at Busuma. Ambulance coverage is limited. Shortages of essential medicines, medical and non-medical equipment, and qualified health personnel continue to affect the quality and availability of services. Supplies for managing moderate acute malnutrition remain insufficient, leaving vulnerable children at heightened risk.
- **Referral hospitals continue to face major challenges**. Both Ruyigi District Hospital and Rema Hospital struggle with limited infrastructure, gaps in equipment, essential medicines, and trained staff. These constraints affect the quality and coverage of care for referred cases.
- **Mortality remains a concern**. Several deaths were reported during the period, most occurring at home (including traditional and religious practices) or at referral hospitals. UNHCR and health partners continue community awareness campaigns with refugee representatives to encourage refugees to seek medical care early.

Livelihood

From 17–18 February, UNHCR led a joint livelihoods assessment at the Busuma refugee site with partners including WFP, UNDP, FAO, CARE, IRC, World Vision, Concern, ZOA et UPHWO. Through eight focus group discussions with women, men and youth representatives, refugees identified priority areas to strengthen self-reliance and support peaceful coexistence with host communities, including access to vocational training, small business start-up support, improved market infrastructure, energy access and environmental protection. The findings will inform a joint action plan guiding partners' future intervention.

Shelter and Infrastructure/ NFIs

- In February, **UNHCR and partner COPED continued developing the Busuma refugee site**. By 28 February, **over 1,017,000 m² of land had been cleared and 84 residential blocks established. More than 16,928 meters of access roads**, including three main routes, were completed, improving mobility and access to essential services. Road rehabilitation, including 1,500 meters of drainage works is ongoing to ensure safe and reliable movement, especially during the rainy season.
- **UNHCR and its construction partners completed 38 communal hangars, in addition to the 52 communal shelters built in January, to provide temporary accommodation** for refugees. On the site, a total of three storage hangars, five community kitchens, two hospitalization shelters, and 11 multi-purpose Rubhalls (in three zones) have been established to support essential services including in distributions areas. The registration center was finalized, and two additional listening spaces were installed by IRC and Save the Children, complementing the one installed by SAD.
- **300 additional family tents were installed during the reporting period, bringing the total to 3,407 tents** provided by UNHCR and partner COPED since the onset of the emergency. In addition, **814 Refugee Housing Units** (RHUs) have been allocated to refugees.

Needs and Gaps

- **Road rehabilitation and drainage works require continued support to ensure safe access throughout the rainy season**.
- Sustained partner capacity is required to maintain construction, logistics, and service delivery at scale.

Food and cash assistance

- A total of **26,444 refugees from 5,122 households received essential non-food items** distributed by UNHCR's partner AIRD in February. The items provided included blankets, mats, soap, 10-liter buckets, 20-liter jerrycans, mosquito nets, solar lamps, and kitchen kits. In addition, CRS, through its partner Caritas, contributed soap to support household hygiene. These distributions continue to address urgent shelter and household needs across the Busuma refugee site.

Needs and Gaps

- Food security challenges remain high for the most vulnerable households.

Energy and Environment

- In February, **40 solar streetlights provided by UNDP were installed at the Busuma refugee site, bringing the total to 80 solar streetlights**. The lighting contributes to improve safety, night-time visibility, and access to essential services particularly for women, children and persons with specific needs.
- **650 trees were planted by PEFE in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment**. This initiative contributes to environmental restoration and promotes more sustainable site management.

Needs and Gaps

- Large areas of the site are still without lighting, increasing protection risks.
- Access to cooking fuel remains a critical gap.

WASH

- **In February, access to water slightly increased at the Busuma refugee site**. 15 water bladders currently installed provide a total storage capacity of 280,000 litres per day which represented **approximately 4.2 litres/person per day**. While this marks a slight improvement, it remains significantly below emergency standards. The installations were supported by UNHCR, the Burundi Red Cross, UNICEF, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Water trucking operations continue, with each partner doing between two to four rotations per day to refill the tanks and supply the site.
- **MSF has captured a natural water source, supplying an estimated 90,000 litres per day** to five water points and two bladders, with distribution expansion ongoing. UNHCR partner COPED has also identified another source, with preparatory works expected soon, to further strengthen water availability at Busuma site.
- **WASH actors at Busuma refugee site continued expanding sanitation facilities to address urgent needs**. UNHCR and COPED installed 160 temporary latrine blocks (1,600 doors) and 103 showers blocks (1,030 doors). Additional emergency facilities were built by World Vision (180 emergency latrines, 80 showers). **Efforts toward durable infrastructure also progressed**, Burundi Red Cross started the construction of 11 blocks (44 latrines, 22 showers) ,2 permanent blocks started by UNDP, and 1 block by the Stamm Foundation. Two additional solid waste pits were excavated, bringing the total to 52. These combined efforts aim to reduce health risks and transition from emergency to sustainable sanitation at Busuma.

Needs and Gaps

- **Thousands of refugees still lack access to shelters** and live under extremely harsh conditions.
- **Water supply remains insufficient** exposing refugees to serious daily challenges.
- **Emergency latrines are insufficient** (ratio to 88 people/latrine) leaving many refugees without safe sanitation facilities which increase the risk of disease transmission.
- **Emergency showers** 42 non-functional shower blocks, the tarpaulins have been stolen which reduces the ratio to 110 people/showers.

High level visits

- In February, **UNHCR Burundi welcomed the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, accompanied by the Deputy Regional Director** and the UNHCR Representative, for a field visit to Busuma refugee site. She visited distribution and health facilities, met with newly arrived refugees, and engaged with humanitarian partners to review ongoing challenges. The visit reaffirmed UNHCR's commitment to protection and ensuring that assistance remains aligned with the needs of refugees.

- In February, during her visit to Burundi, the **European Commissioner Hadja Lahbib visited the Cishemere transit centre, accompanied by the UNHCR Representative** and members of the European diplomatic corps based in Bujumbura. During the visit, the **Commissioner met with Congolese refugees and held discussions with refugee women to hear directly about their experiences and immediate needs.** The visit highlighted the continued attention and support of European partners to the refugee response in Burundi

With many thanks to :

United Nations CERF Central Emergency Response Fund

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