



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



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## Burundi: Urgent funding requirements

Voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees returning from Rwanda and Tanzania (September - December 2020)

### Estimated population of concern



**20,000**

INDIVIDUALS IN TANZANIA

**8,000**

INDIVIDUALS IN RWANDA

**30,000**

RETURNEES FROM BOTH  
TANZANIA AND RWANDA  
(2,000 FROM ELSEWHERE)

**\$9.6 million**

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS  
(Rwanda \$1.5 million; Tanzania  
\$1.6; and Burundi \$6.5 million)

This note on funding requirements is designed to support the safe and dignified repatriation of Burundian refugees returning from Rwanda, Tanzania and other countries of asylum, and to promote their resilience and sustainable reintegration in Burundi. UNHCR is not promoting refugee return to Burundi at the current time but is supporting those who indicate they have made a free and informed decision to voluntarily repatriate.

Following the relatively peaceful elections of President Ndayishimiye in June and his call for Burundians living in exile to return, an increase in interest in voluntary return has been observed.

The Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian refugees from **Tanzania** started in September 2017. As of 31 August 2020, a total of 90,747 Burundian refugees have been assisted to return home. An increase in the return trend has been observed since July 2020, with more than 10,000 of the 12,500 who have been assisted to return home between January and August 2020 having returned in the last few months. UNHCR anticipates that nearly 20,000 refugees will return between September and December 2020, based on the recent trends of registration for return.

*Above: A group of Burundian refugees queue before boarding buses to return home, in Nemba, Rwanda.*

In **Rwanda**, at the end of July 2020, a group of refugees requested assistance to repatriate home. A subsequent tripartite meeting between Rwanda, Burundi and UNHCR on 13 August agreed that the principles and provisions of the existing 2005 Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundians refugees in Rwanda remain valid. All parties consequently agreed to be bound by its provisions and agreed to work together to facilitate refugee returns to Burundi from Rwanda. From 27 August to mid-September 2020, nearly 1,000 individuals have returned from Rwanda, with approximately 8,000 expected to return between September and December 2020.

In **Burundi**, UNHCR is preparing to receive about 30,000 returnees from Rwanda, Tanzania, and several other asylum countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo and potentially Kenya and countries in Southern Africa.

## Working environment

In **Burundi**, as of 15 September 97,746 assisted returnees have been received in the areas of return, in conditions that are not fully conducive to sustainable reintegration, and with a potentially negative impact on the social cohesion, as former refugees are going back to areas which lack adequate basic social services for the population. The Burundi government has made refugee return a priority. Most returnees are coming from Tanzania where the government has also been pushing for more returns. In the light of a relatively improved security situation in Burundi and following the appeal made by the President of the Republic to the Burundian refugees to return, repatriation is noticeably increasing, putting more pressure on both UNHCR financial and human resources as well as the social and economic resources in the country.

UNHCR has continued to advocate for the inclusion of returnees in national development projects and has coordinated with development actors to provide opportunities for successful reintegration, in particular through the Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan (JRRRP). Nonetheless, the Voluntary Repatriation operation remains gravely underfunded, and the prospects for successful reintegration remain concerning. Without further funding, UNHCR and its partners will not be able to maintain assistance for repatriation, with significant implications for both those refugees who have already returned, and those who wish to return now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the already fragile economy of Burundian households, as the borders remain closed and cross border commerce has been halted, resulting in price increases on basic goods.

Without urgent assistance, the constantly increasing food insecurity combined with the limited opportunities for income generating activities, returnees are likely to result in the adoption of negative coping mechanisms by certain returnees, as well as to cause secondary movements and to impede social cohesion in areas of return, especially in the areas receiving large numbers of returnees, which are often among the poorest areas of the country.

From September to August 2020, UNHCR will be facilitating the voluntary repatriation of approximately 8,000 Burundian refugees from **Rwanda**. UNHCR will register individuals who express the will to return; undertake verification of voluntariness, ensure protection counselling where needed, and the completion of Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRFs); and organize the repatriation movements with pre-departure preparations, including the setup of convoy manifests, health screening and transportation from the camp to the border of Burundi. The provision of return packages and the reintegration process will be handled and monitored by the UNHCR operation in Burundi. As of mid-September 2020, over 5,000 Burundians refugees in Rwanda had registered to return.

**Tanzania** plans to facilitate the repatriation of 20,000 Burundian refugees between September and December 2020. An increase in those who register to return has been observed since the May elections in Burundi, with approximately 4,400 refugees registering to return every month since June 2020 (as compared to an average of 960 per month from January to June 2020). The current return operation from Tanzania to Burundi is taking place within the provisions of the Tripartite Agreement between the two governments and UNHCR of May 2001 and the parties have reaffirmed that repatriation will continue to be facilitated for those Burundian refugees whose registered intention to return and the voluntariness of their decision has been verified.

Due to the protracted refugee situation in the country, the strict encampment policy, restrictive policies and chronic underfunding, the refugee population in **Tanzania** remains highly dependent on humanitarian assistance, exposing many refugees and asylum-seekers to a variety of protection risks. The Government of Tanzania continues to reiterate its position that naturalization or local integration would not be possible for Burundian refugees and that voluntary repatriation is the only eventual solution.

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## Urgent needs

Given the prevailing COVID-19 operational environment, the needs for the return movements has increased significantly both for the host countries and the receiving country. Additional measures are required both in transit/reception centers and in

transportation means, to ensure social distancing and observe COVID-19 protocols. For example, buses to transport returnees have had to be increased to ensure proper social distancing as well as implementing proper hygiene and sanitary measures.

## Burundi



### Cash assistance

Cash grants of 150 USD per adult and 75 USD per child. The assistance is delivered through a mobile money system developed in partnership with the telecommunications company Lumitel in accordance with UNHCR standards.



### Reception and accommodation of arriving persons in transit centres

Data verification and national documentation; distribution of return packages with food and NFIs and assistance to persons with specific needs; Rehabilitation of Songore Transit center (for returnees from Rwanda); Building of new facilities for COVID-19 testing and isolation of suspected cases in all the transit centers.



### Protection, monitoring and provision of reintegration assistance

in the return areas of Makamba, Muyinga and Ruhigi

## Rwanda



### Registration, shelter and infrastructure and water, sanitation and hygiene

Building up the capacity of both the registration and departure center in Mahama camp; renovation of the existing facilities; construction of additional accommodation units and; upgrade of WASH facilities and public structures.



### Public health

COVID-19 testing for all departing refugees.



### Increase operational capacity in Kirehe District

through: the upgrade of office space in Kirehe District; the recruitment of qualified UNHCR staff and affiliate workforce (including specialized protection and technical experts); the selection of partners with the required expertise and operational capacity to carry out pre-departure formalities.



### Returnee assistance for returnees to Burundi

Payment of transportation costs for returnees to Burundi

## Tanzania



### Registration, return assistance and protection

Registration, organizing and facilitating return convoys to Burundi, including pre-departure interviews to verify voluntariness of returnees and assessing of protection needs;



### Public health, shelter and basic assistance

Pre-departure health checks including COVID-19 screening; accommodation at departure centers within COVID-19 protocols as well as basic assistance during the return movements, including food and water.



## Key challenges

### Rwanda

The voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees was not envisaged as part of the UNHCR 2020 Country Refugee Response Plan for Rwanda. Following the Tripartite technical meeting UNHCR, Government of Rwanda and Government of Burundi on 13 August 2020, in order to respond to the expressed wishes of refugees and the momentum of newly established cooperation between the two governments, UNHCR organized the first Voluntary Repatriation convoy within only two weeks without having received any additional funds; With the COVID-19 pandemic, cross border movement formalities have been

increased to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus. The Mahama camp in Rwanda, where over 80% of Burundian refugees are hosted, was identified as at risk of outbreak due to its location close to the border with Tanzania. By the end of August 2020, some 29 refugees were identified with COVID-19. UNHCR and Government Authorities placed the camp at the highest priority for the prevention and response measures. This has necessitated additional requirements for all refugees to be tested before return, which constitutes significant unplanned costs.

### Tanzania

- It is a possibility that in the coming months, especially given the upcoming October 2020 Tanzania Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the protection space for Burundian refugees may remain constrained and possibly further diminished.
- Due to the protracted refugee situation in the country, the strict encampment policy, restrictive policies, chronic underfunding, and with the results of the elections in Burundi, there has been a surge on the interest in return, increasing the number of returning refugees in each convoy causing quick depletion of currently available resources.
- Due to COVID-19 preventive measures to be put in place, the operational cost of each voluntary repatriation convoy has significantly increased.
- Burundi has limited reception capacity and not always able to receive all persons who sign up for return due to inadequate infrastructure for COVID-19 prevention and mitigation. This limits the number of persons that can be returned per convoy and in turn sometimes puts UNHCR Tanzania in conflict with the Government who would not want to see any constraints on the voluntary repatriation programme.

## Burundi

- ▶ With few resources and insufficient material assistance, returnees face difficulties upon return as their needs are exacerbated by the fragile economic context of Burundi. Many persons with specific needs (PSN) face even greater vulnerability. During returnee monitoring, 61% of returnees reported that they consume only one meal per day.
- ▶ Due to the ongoing global pandemic, the assessment of the capacity of health facilities in the transit centers has shown an urgent need to strengthen the following minimum requirements: functional triage system and isolation rooms, trained staff (for early detection and standard principles of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)) and sufficient IPC materials, including personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ▶ The official health surveillance system needs to be strengthened in terms of alert notification, investigation and reporting of cases according to the national and WHO's guidelines. These regulations include national protocols for reporting infectious diseases and UNHCR surveillance guidance for COVID-19.
- ▶ Both returnee monitoring and reintegration assistance have been limited throughout 2020 due to underfunding. The increase in returns heightens the need for these activities.

## Implementation

In Rwanda, voluntary repatriation movements from Mahama camp started on 27 August 2020, with a first convoy of 486 persons. Subsequent convoys of approximately 500 persons will be organized once a week. Throughout all the phases, UNHCR pays special attention to the needs of the most

do not pose any health threat to themselves and to other passengers. Special arrangements are made for persons with specific needs and other vulnerable persons.

In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, additional health measures are undertaken. Maximum precautionary measures have been

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