



UNHCR BURUNDI COUNTRY BRIEFING

AUGUST 2009

COUNTRY INFORMATION	3
A. PEACE PROCESS	3
B. SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION	3
C. SECURITY SITUATION	3
D. THE UN AND BURUNDI	3
E. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS	4
UNHCR OPERATIONS IN BURUNDI	6
A. REPATRIATION AND REINTEGRATION OF BURUNDIAN REFUGEES	6
1. FIGURES AND PERSPECTIVES	6
2. REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES	7
3. UNHCR'S ACTIVITIES	7
4. OUTLOOK	9
B. PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS	10
1. REFUGEES IN BURUNDI	10
2. REFORM OF THE ASYLUM SYSTEM	10
D. BUDGETS	12

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Photo: Nyanza-Lac / Makamba province: Burundian returnees have built small shelters on small pieces of their former land (25 x 30m), which they found occupied. The former 1972 refugees wait to recover their family land.2009. © A. Kirchof / UNHCR

COUNTRY INFORMATION

A. Peace process

Burundi is in a phase of peace consolidation, following the gradual end of the conflict that started in 1993 and left an estimated 300,000 persons dead. The Arusha agreements (2000), the democratic elections and the acceptance of a power-sharing constitution (2005) as well as the ceasefire agreement with the last rebel group Palipehutu-FNL (2006) were important milestones on the way to peace. Further progress was made with the transformation of the rebel group's political wing into a party (FNL) in April 2009 and the start of the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of its former combatants. The demobilization process of former FNL rebels and FNL dissidents (FNL-D) is making good progress. Out of the 5,000 FNL combatants foreseen to be demobilized, more than 3,500 ex-combatants as well as all children associated with the FNL or FNL-D and all dissidents have already been demobilized. Programmes to support the socio-economic reintegration of these ex-combatants are planned to start in the near future.

An important indicator for the reestablishment of peace has been the voluntary return of Burundian refugees. Hundreds of thousands of Burundians had been driven out of the country following a number of inter-ethnic massacres throughout Burundi's post-colonial history, notably in 1972 when around 200,000 persons (mostly Hutus) were killed, on a smaller scale in 1988, and in the years following 1993. Today, more than six percent of Burundi's inhabitants are former refugees who have returned over the last six years from the neighbouring countries and in particular from Tanzania.

B. Socio-economic situation

With the lowest gross national income per capita among sub-Saharan countries (\$105)¹, Burundi is one of the world's poorest countries. The country is ranked 172nd among 179 countries in the UNDP's update of 2008 Human Development Index. Sixteen percent of the estimated 8.9 million Burundians² are considered "vulnerable" and need permanent humanitarian aid, while a further 68 percent live close to the poverty line, according to the World Food Programme (WFP). Several sharp rises in prices for food and other commodities in the past years have increased social tensions and criminality.

Burundi is largely dependent on international aid for its recovery. The Government's Priority Action Programme for the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) from 2007 to 2010 has received a positive response from international partners. During a May 2007 donor conference, donors pledged a total of USD 665.6 million for this 4-year period.

C. Security situation

The overall security situation has significantly improved since the beginning of UNHCR's repatriation operation in 2002. The United Nations lowered their Security Phases for the north-western provinces of Bubanza and Bujumbura Rural in March 2009. The whole country is therefore now under UN Security Phase III. The level of banditry in some regions remains high due to the difficult economic situation. The circulation of high numbers of firearms among the civilian population and their easy availability adds to this problem.

D. The UN and Burundi

UNHCR is working closely with other UN agencies within the framework of the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB)³, which replaced in January 2007 the UN peacekeeping mission (ONUB). BINUB concentrates its efforts on four domains:

- Peace consolidation and democratic governance;
- Disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reform of the security sector;
- Promotion and protection of human rights and measures to end impunity;

¹ *African Development Indicators*. World Bank, 2007.

² *The State of the World Population*. UNFPA, 2008.

³ BINUB's current mandate has been extended to 31 December 2009 through *Security Council Resolution 1858 (2008)*.

- Coordination of the interventions of donors and UN agencies.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission in June 2007 endorsed a Burundi-led strategy to guide the engagement and dialogue between the Government, the UN and other international partners to secure peace and sustainable development. In addition, Burundi has been since 2007 among the first countries to receive support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund.⁴

E. Internally displaced persons

No reliable data is available as to exact the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated their number to be about 100,000 in 2006. The Government of Burundi has conducted a survey of the populations (including conflict IDPs) living in displacement sites, in old peace villages, and in rural integrated villages. A draft report was released for consultation with Government departments, UN agencies and civil society end of July 2009. Specific numbers for conflict IDPs were not included but the report suggests that many displacement sites in the Southern Provinces have now closed whilst in some other provinces (particularly Bubanza, Bujumbura Rural and Bujumbura Mairie), the populations and number of sites has grown. A closer analysis of each site was recommended in order to develop a strategy for durable solutions.

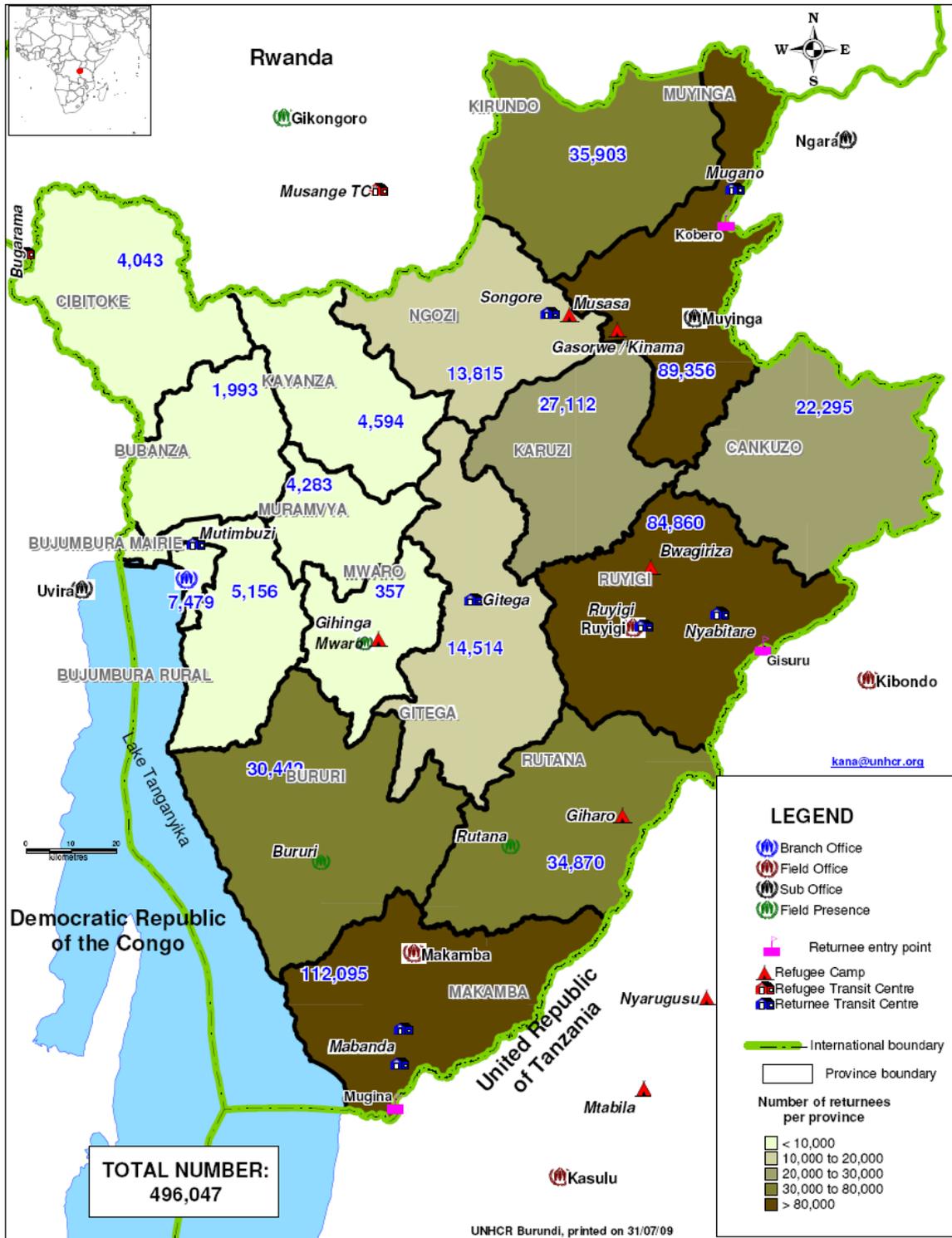
The situation of IDPs does in most cases not differ significantly from that of the local population, although in a number of cases land ownership disputes have forced IDPs to leave their sites. A systematic survey on IDPs, conducted in 2005 by OCHA, identified regional differences: Most IDPs in the south of the country expressed their willingness to return to their place of origin as soon as they have the means to do so, while those in northern Burundi feared that their return could bring back ethnic tensions. The majority continued to cultivate their own land during the day and spend the night in IDP settlements.⁵

Although UNHCR in Burundi has no specific IDP programmes, IDPs have been included in UNHCR activities benefiting returning refugees, such as shelter and legal assistance programmes.

⁴ For further information please refer to: *Fifth Report of the Secretary-General on the UN Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB)*, (S/2009/270)

⁵ *Enquête sur les populations déplacées au Burundi 2005*, OCHA Burundi, 26 June 2005.

UNHCR BURUNDI
NUMBER OF RETURNEES PER PROVINCE
01 March 2002 - 31 July 2009



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

UNHCR OPERATIONS IN BURUNDI

The Burundi operation involves a large repatriation and reintegration programme in support of Burundian nationals returning home and a sizeable programme for refugees, primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

A. Repatriation and reintegration of Burundian refugees

The objectives for 2009 include to:

- ⇒ *Ensure the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees in conditions of safety and dignity;*
- ⇒ *Facilitate the reintegration of returnees and help to resolve land disputes.*

1. Figures and perspectives

More than 496,000 Burundians have returned voluntarily from Tanzania and other countries since UNHCR began to facilitate the return of Burundian refugees in 2002. As the situation in the country improved, a campaign to promote the return of Burundian refugees living in the camps in Tanzania was launched on 20 June 2006.

In 2008, 95,000 Burundians returned, more than in any other year before. This sharp increase was due to the consolidation of the Tanzanian camps as well as the beginning of the organized return of long-term refugees. High numbers of returnees, in combination with the increasing return of vulnerable individuals and landless refugees, have led to an increased need for reintegration activities in 2009.

For 2009, UNHCR has prepared for the return of 55,000 Burundian refugees:

- 25,000 refugees from Mtabila camp in Tanzania;
- 25,000 refugees from 1972 from Tanzania's Old Settlements;
- 5,000 refugees from other countries, such as Rwanda.

These planning figures may be modified as the situation develops. The progress made in repatriation will be further reviewed during the 14th Tripartite Commission meeting between Burundi, Tanzania and UNHCR, which should take place in the second half of 2009 in Bujumbura.

1.1 Return from the refugee camps

Over the past seven years, most returnees came from the refugee camps in Tanzania, which host mostly (but not exclusively) refugees who fled Burundi in the 1990s. The majority of these returnees have a clear perspective for reintegration, since they have access to their land and maintained family and other social links. After the closure of Nduta camp in December 2008, Mtabila remained the only camp for Burundian refugees in Tanzania. This camp, which is across the border from Makamba province in southern Burundi, hosts currently some 35,000 refugees. Less than 10 percent of these are long-term refugees from 1972. The Government of Tanzania plans to close Mtabila in 2009.

1.2 Return from settlements (refugees of 1972)

In March 2008, UNHCR embarked on a new operation to facilitate the return of an estimated 55,000 refugees who fled Burundi in 1972, and who have expressed their wish to return. These refugees live mostly as farmers in three settlements⁶, in Tanzania's Tabora and Rukwa regions. Over 160,000 Burundian refugees in these settlements have applied for naturalization in Tanzania instead of repatriation.

In 2008, 30,500 refugees from the 1972 group have returned. Their destinations were almost exclusively the southern provinces of Makamba, Bururi and – for a smaller number of returnees – Rutana. The return of the remaining 25,000 refugees from this group who opted for repatriation has started in April and is expected to end in October 2009. UNHCR has launched a two-year Supplementary Budget (2008/09) for the refugees from the Old Settlements, in order to facilitate their return to Burundi and local integration in Tanzania.

⁶ Refugees in the three Old Settlements – Katumba, Mishamo and Ulyankulu – live self-sufficient and do not depend from any humanitarian assistance since humanitarian agencies withdrew in the mid-1980's.

2. Reintegration challenges

The lack of access to land constitutes the biggest single challenge for the reintegration of returnees. It affects primarily the returnees from the 1972 group. A substantial number of returnees from the Old Settlements who had returned during the previous year did still not have access to land in 2009, mostly because their family land has been redistributed by the authorities or occupied in the 1970's. Some returnees do not even know their family's place of origin or do not have social support structures to accommodate them while waiting for the restitution of their land, and are therefore requesting UNHCR or the authorities for temporary shelter. However, through improved support in Burundi and Tanzania, a positive trend has been observed since the second half of 2008, with less returnees requesting temporary shelter.

A number of assessments and the ongoing monitoring of both groups of returnees (1972 and 1993) showed that most returnees have good relations with their neighbours and the authorities, even if the number of land conflicts were rising in southern Burundi related to the return of long-term refugees. The problems affecting the majority of returnees are mostly of a socio-economic nature, concerning issues such as food security, health care or education. Four out of five returnee families need to rebuild their houses upon return.

3. UNHCR's activities

In order to ensure the sustainability of returns, UNHCR's focuses not only on the return process itself, but also on reintegration, including shelter provision and solutions for land rights issues. This is complemented by protection activities and a countrywide returnee monitoring programme.

Furthermore, UNHCR plays the role of a facilitator, contributing to joint approaches in reintegration issues of UN, Government and other actors, for instance in the framework of the *Integrated Commission on Return and Reintegration* (see under "Partnerships").

The impact of UNHCR's programmes has been analysed in two recent evaluations: An evaluation for the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration examined the overall impact of return and reintegration activities⁷, while a second evaluation by UNHCR and external consultants focussed on the impact of cash grants provided to returnees (July 2009)⁸.

3.1 Transport and initial assistance

UNHCR assures the transport of returnees and their belongings from the camps and settlements to their commune of origin, passing through transit centres where they receive initial assistance, including:

- Non-food items such as mosquito nets, plastic sheeting, blankets, etc.;
- Food assistance from WFP (first ration of a total of 6 months food);
- Cash grants⁹;
- Medical assistance and information on HIV/AIDS;
- Documents required to obtain national identity cards;
- Identification and assistance of unaccompanied minors.

Returnees from the Old Settlements in Tanzania receive an increased transport allowance (100 kg of luggage per person). Since 2009, they receive the same package of food and non-food items as returnees from the camps.

⁷ Impact Evaluation of PRM Humanitarian Assistance to the Repatriation and Reintegration of Burundi Refugees: www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/pubs/index.htm

⁸ Money matters: An evaluation of the use of cash grants in UNHCR's voluntary repatriation and reintegration programme in Burundi: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a5f436d9.html>

⁹ Every returnee receives a cash grant of 50,000.- Burundian Francs (approx. USD 42.-). 20 percent of this amount is handed out at the transit centers, whereas the rest is available through a network of financial cooperatives in communes of return.

3.2 Shelter assistance

UNHCR assists the most vulnerable returnees to rebuild their shelter by providing building materials for simple houses (35 sqm) and technical assistance. The beneficiaries construct the houses with the help of the community. Between 2003 and 2009, UNHCR has helped more than 93,000 vulnerable families to build a new home. For 2009, the construction of 22, 200 shelters is planned for returnees who have land for construction in their communities. 10 percent of the shelter materials are given to needy households who were not refugees, such as former IDPs.

UNHCR has set up 13 temporary accommodation centres for the returnees from the 1972 group in southern Burundi. These provide returnees with shelter nearby their area of origin, in order to allow them solve their land conflicts.

In addition, UNHCR is contributing to joint efforts by the Government and several UN agencies to settle a part of the landless returnees through the creation of integrated villages in main provinces of return¹⁰. The project aims at providing them with access to agricultural land, income-generating activities and assuring their access to basic services (schools, health facilities, access to water etc.). In close cooperation with the Ministry for Territory and Land Management, UNHCR is responsible for the preparation of sites and provides support for (self-) construction. Other agencies, such as UNDP, UNICEF and FAO will be supporting community participation and providing for other infrastructures, e.g. water, sanitation and agriculture.

The following villages have been established since 2008:

- Muriza (Butaganzwa commune, Ruyigi province) with 98 houses;
- Gitara (Mabanda commune / Makamba province) with 200 houses;
- Nyakazi (Kibago commune / Makamba province) with 200 houses;
- Murembera (Giharo commune / Rutana province) with 60 houses.
- Nkurye (Giharo / Rutana province) with 140 houses.

The construction of up to eleven further villages with a maximum of 2,200 houses in provinces bordering Tanzania and in Bururi is foreseen for 2009.

This brings the overall number of shelters foreseen in 2009 to 22,200.

3.3 Land conflict resolution

UNHCR's programme for the peaceful resolution of conflicts is carried out by two non-governmental organisations (ACCORD and AFJ) in the main areas of return. Most conflicts concern access to land. About a quarter of the cases are resolved in mediation sessions, through amicable resolutions such as land sharing. In 2008, the two partners registered over 4,000 new conflicts and resolved more than 750 conflicts through medication. Other activities include the provision of legal assistance to returnees, training of local partners, and logistical support to tribunals to help them implement their decisions.

These efforts complement the work of the Government's Land and Property Commission (*Commission Nationale de Terres et Autres Biens, CNTB*), which is registering land and property conflicts countrywide and is also engaged in finding amicable solutions. UNHCR is supporting CNTB in 2009 to strengthen its capacity in southern Burundi.

Two new UNHCR antenna offices in southern Burundi (Bururi and Rutana) further support the local authorities in finding solutions to land conflicts.

UNHCR has in parallel contributed with its expertise to discussions on administrative and legal measures that could improve land access for vulnerable populations, such as the development of a national land policy¹¹, and the creation of an inventory of state owned land, on which landless persons could settle.

¹⁰ A strategy paper on durable solutions for the landless through the creation of "integrated rural villages" was approved on 4 August 2008 by the *Integrated Commission for Return and Reintegration*

¹¹ A draft for this land policy has been completed in September 2008 ("*Lettre de Politique Foncière*"). It defines four pillars, namely the revision of existing legislation, the restructuring of land services and their modernisation as well as their decentralisation. The fourth pillar is of particular importance to the returnee issue, since it involves the development of durable solutions to address the problems of landless persons.

3.4 Returnee monitoring

Together with the Burundian human rights organisation *Ligue Iteka*, UNHCR is monitoring the situation of returnees. In 2008, 14,000 households were interviewed. This allows UNHCR to follow up on protection cases and to have an overall picture of the reintegration conditions.

3.5 Environmental rehabilitation

To compensate for the wood used under its shelter programme, UNHCR supports reforestation, including the distribution of fruit tree seedlings to returnees. In 2008, some 138,000 fruit and forest tree seedlings were planted.

3.6 Other activities

Other activities include assistance to unaccompanied minors, the provision of health support for chronically ill returnees, and the provision of national identity cards through the Ministry of the Interior, to ensure that returnees have access to basic services.

4. Outlook

UNHCR expects to end organized repatriation from Tanzania in 2009, and seeks funding for the return of 55,000 refugees, mostly from Tanzania. At the end of the operation, the big majority of Burundian refugees from the 1990's will have returned, while the majority of refugees from 1972 should have been naturalized in Tanzania.

In 2010, smaller numbers of refugees (an estimated 10 000 persons) are expected to return from countries throughout the region.

In view of the high number of returnees in 2008 and 2009, reintegration programmes will continue in 2010 in order to ensure that return remains sustainable. A particular focus will be on supporting the many vulnerable and landless returnees.

Reintegration concerns have also been streamlined into the overall UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for 2010 to 2014, in order to allow for a phase-out of UNHCR's more targeted reintegration activities. It is assumed that after the initial reintegration phase, returnees will be generally in the same situation as the rest of the population in their area of return and should thus be supported under the same criteria. At the same time, a particular focus on supporting regions affected by repatriation may be required.

The capacity of the Government to further address land issues will be a determining variable.

B. Protection and assistance of refugees and asylum seekers

The objectives for 2009 include to:

- ⇒ *Protect and assist camp-based and urban refugees from the DRC;*
- ⇒ *Support the new government agency responsible for refugees.*

1. Refugees in Burundi

Burundi is a signatory of the key international instruments on refugee protection, namely the 1951 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and its 1967 Protocol and the *Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* ("OAU Convention").

The country hosts mostly refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and in particular from South Kivu province.

The last major influx occurred in June 2004. Since then, sporadic arrivals have been registered in Burundi, as well as increasing requests from Congolese who had lived in urban areas to be transferred to refugee camps.

To ensure that assistance is provided on an equitable manner and to discourage double registration, UNHCR has installed a fingerprinting database and carried out verification exercises in 2008, leading to a reduction of the number of registered refugees.

A number of refugees have expressed their interest in returning to the DRC. UNHCR has initiated in 2008 a tripartite dialogue with the Governments of Burundi and the DRC to examine the possibilities of organized voluntary return, should the situation in South Kivu improve. However, in view of the volatile and rather precarious situation as a consequence of the ongoing clashes between the FDLR rebels (*Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda*) and the Congolese Army (FARDC) in the context of the latter's military operation, Kimia II, organized voluntary return to South Kivu seems unlikely to happen at the moment.

Some 400 refugees come from Rwanda and other countries.

1.1 Refugee Camps

UNHCR runs four camps sheltering Congolese refugees and one for Rwandan refugees¹², in cooperation with the Government and various partners. In the camps, UNHCR provides food through WFP, education, vocational training, health services, as well as access to water, firewood, sanitation and shelter.

The transfer of several hundred persons per month to the refugee camps has led to their saturation in early 2009. Therefore, a new refugee camp in Bwagiriza (Ruyigi province) was opened in May 2009, which will also accommodate Congolese refugees from Gihinga (Mwaro). The first transfer of refugees from Gihinga to Bwagiriza is foreseen for end of August.

1.2 Urban refugees

In addition to the camp-based refugees, there are 10,500 urban refugees and asylum seekers registered in Burundi, mostly from the DRC. UNHCR provides them with medical support and follows up protection-related cases. Urban refugees are particularly affected by the tense socio-economic situation, leading many to move to the camps.

2. Reform of the asylum system

Burundi's first asylum law has entered into force in February 2008. In addition, a new national asylum office, ONPRA¹³, was created. UNHCR is involved in capacity-building for ONPRA and provides training to the agency's staff in order to accelerate asylum procedures and enhance refugee protection.

¹² The camps are: Bwagiriza (Ruyigi province), Gasorwe (Muyinga), Musasa (Ngozi), and Gihinga (Mwaro) for refugees from DRC and Giharo (Rutana) for Rwandan refugees.

¹³ *Office National pour la Protection des Réfugiés et des Apatrides*

C. Partnerships

UNHCR is working in support of the Burundian Government and in close partnership with other actors, including BINUB, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, WHO and the World Bank, to bridge the gap between assistance to returnees and broader development efforts, aiming at improving the socio-economic conditions in areas of return. These partnerships include a joint project with UNICEF in areas of return, as well as agreements with other UN agencies on reintegration measures.

The creation of the *Integrated Commission on Return and Reintegration* in 2007, has strongly contributed to common approaches between all actors. It is chaired by the Minister for National Solidarity, Refugee Repatriation, and Social Reintegration and comprises four other key Ministers as well as representatives of UN agencies, including UNHCR, and donors.

UNHCR implements its programs in partnership with the following government and non-governmental partners:

Government agencies:

- Ministère de la Solidarité Nationale, du Rapatriement des Réfugiés et de la Réintégration Sociale (Projet d'Appui au Rapatriement et à la Réintégration des Sinistrés – PARESI)
- Commission Nationale de Terres et Autres Biens
- Ministère de l'Intérieur (Office National pour la Protection des Réfugiés et des Apatrides - ONPRA – and Centre national d'identification)

Non-Governmental organizations:

- African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)
- African Humanitarian Action (AHA)
- Association des Femmes Juristes (AFJ)
- Conseil pour l'Education et le Développement (COPED)
- Fédération Nationale des Coopératives d'Epargne et de Crédit du Burundi (FENACOBUR)
- Handicap International France
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Ligue Iteka
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Stop SIDA
- Transcultural Psychosocial Organization / Health Net International (TPO)
- World Outreach International (WOI)

Others:

- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

D. Budgets

Burundi - Total Budget for 2009*	
<i>Activities and Services as per Sector</i>	<i>US\$</i>
PROTECTION/ MONITORING/ COORDINATION	5,774,088
TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS	4,137,160
DOMSTIC NEEDS / HOUSEHLD SUPPLY	2,797,111
WATER	270,349
SANITATION	36,335
HEALTH AND NUTRITION	1,532,833
SHELTER AND INFRASTRUCTURE	13,586,655
COMMUNITY SERVICES	350,947
EDUCATION	296,425
FORESTRY	185,920
INCOME GENERATION	200,398
LEGAL ASSISTANCE	1,692,080
OPERATIONAL SUPPORT TO AGENCIES	2,114,710
TOTAL OPERATIONS	32,975,011
PROGRAMME SUPPORT	4,355,892
TOTAL	37,330,903

* This budget comprises the Annual Programme Budget (AB) for Burundi, the Burundi component for reintegration activities of the Supplementary Programme Budget (SB) for Comprehensive Solutions for Burundian Refugees in Tanzania's Old Settlements, and so called New and Additional Mandate related activities (NAM).