

RWANDA COUNTRY REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN

January-December 2021



Cover photograph: Rwanda. First Burundian refugees return home after five years in exile A Burundian refugee mother and child prepare to board a bus in the Rwandan border town of Nemba to return home after living in Mahama camp since 2015. [© UNHCR/Eugene Sibomana](#)

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2021 PLANNED RESPONSE

109,422

PROJECTED REFUGEE
POPULATION BY 2021

US\$ 143M

REQUIREMENTS FOR 2021

17

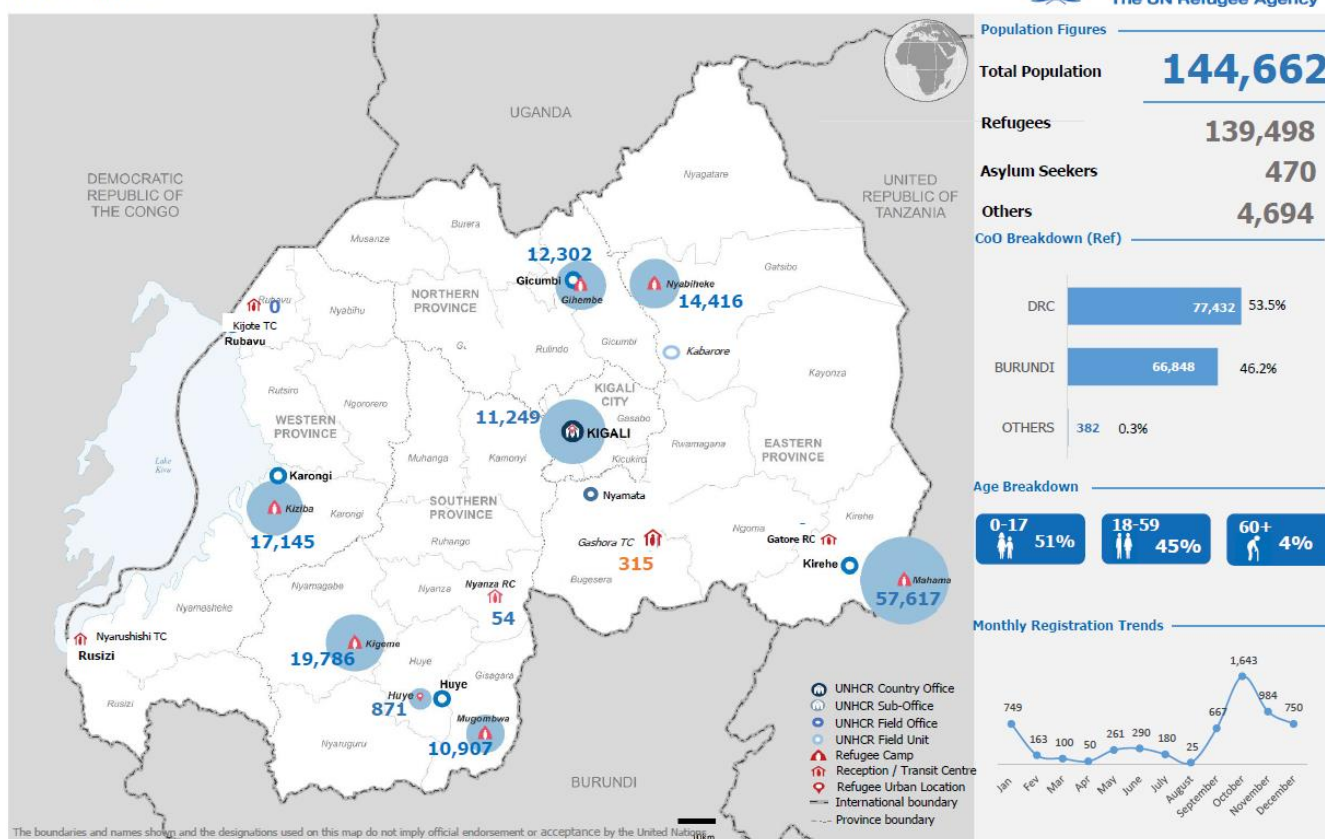
PARTNERS
INVOLVED

3,000 ESTIMATED RWANDAN RETURNEES IN 2021

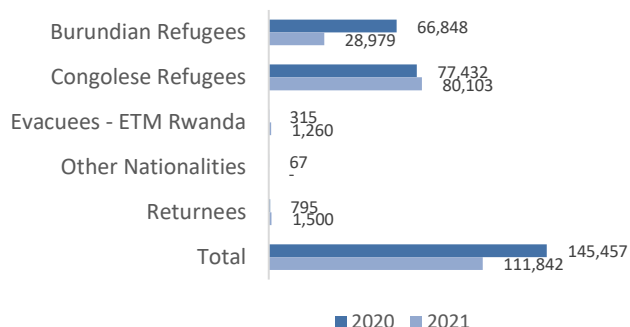
125,000 ASSISTED HOST POPULATION

Rwanda

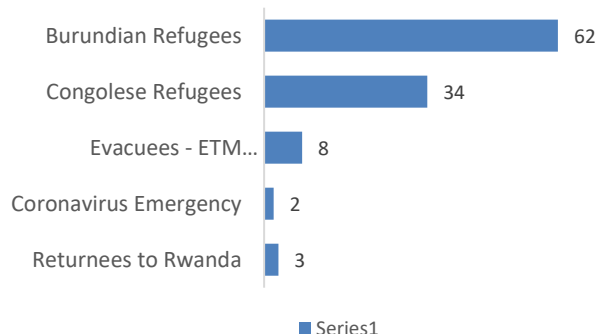
Population of Concern to UNHCR
as of 31 December 2020



Refugee Population Trends



Requirements for 2021 | In millions\$



Background and Achievements

Overview

Rwanda has been welcoming refugees for over two decades. By the end of 2020, Rwanda hosted 144,662 individuals, 143,853 individually registered as refugees, from different nationalities (Congolese camps (74,556), Burundian camp (57,617) and urban settings (11,365) as well as 315 persons of concern evacuated from Libya under the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM). Some 809 individuals are pending registration and pending national asylum procedures.

For the Congolese situation, the verification exercise was completed in Rwanda's Congolese refugee camps in 2019. Some 13,000 Congolese refugees expressed the desire to voluntarily return to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from the exercise. Since the beginning of 2018, attempts have been made to organize a Tripartite meeting between Rwanda (GoR) and the DRC. However, this meeting has not taken place to date, although UNHCR continues to advocate for such a meeting. In the meantime, increasing bilateral cooperation between both countries is noticed, including strengthening security in bordering areas. On 17 April 2019, technical discussions were initiated with the organization of a technical Level Coordination Meeting in the Rubavu District of Rwanda on the Voluntary Repatriation Operation for Congolese and Rwandan refugees in Rubavu District, Rwanda. The meeting was attended by delegations from the Government of Rwanda (MINEMA) and the DRC Government (CNR). The meeting agreed on several action points, including facilitating go-and-See visits and reviewing the current return process. Go-and-See visits have been proposed at the Goma level. However, such activity to be coordinated at the Kinshasa level is currently on hold. While options were under consideration, the COVID-19 outbreak and fights in the eastern regions of DRC have affected voluntary repatriation's positive steps. While Rwanda has embarked on the GCR (Global Compact for Refugees) and adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which emphasize the socio and economic inclusion of refugees in national systems, the resettlement of Congolese refugees to the third country from Rwanda, mostly from the oldest camps – Kiziba, Gihembe, and Nyabiheke, remain the only viable, durable solution available.

Given this information, the Congolese refugee population's planning figure in Rwanda for 2021 is estimated to some 80,103 individuals.

In 2020, 674 new Burundian refugees fled into Rwanda for the Burundian situation, with an average of 224 new arrivals per month within the first three months of 2020 and then almost no new arrival afterward. This considerable decrease in the number of new arrivals is mainly due to the difficulty of using land borders after the COVID-19 lockdown in Mid-March 2020 and the political changes in Burundi marked by the Presidential election of May 2020. As of December 2020, Rwanda accommodated over 66,000 refugees

(46%) from Burundi who fled insecurity and unrest due to the political situation. About 76 percents are women and children, and the vast majority (57,617) live in the country's largest refugee camp, Mahama. The remaining Burundian refugees live in urban areas, mainly in Kigali and Huye, and others spread between other camps and reception centers. The Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners cover urgent, lifesaving needs. However, now that the Burundian refugee population has been in Rwanda for five years and continues to grow slowly, emergency facilities established in 2015 are deteriorating and need rehabilitation. The verification exercise in Mahama was completed on 17 January 2020 with a show rate of 96% of all refugees. The exercise showed a pretty stable population. About 2,500 refugees were no shows (resulted in inactive status) in the exercise, and some cases were scheduled for adjudication as they continuously returned to the camp.

Since 2019, 1,359 Burundian refugees have spontaneously returned to Burundi without the assistance of UNHCR. In July-August 2020, following the increased political stability in Burundi, some refugees in Rwanda shared with UNHCR their intentions to return to their home country and requested to be assisted in the process. UNHCR engaged both governments, Burundi and Rwanda, through meetings and secured the governments' commitment to the principles and provisions of the 2005 Tripartite Agreement for the return of Burundian refugees in Rwanda. Between August and December 2020, UNHCR had registered 21,324 Burundian refugees in the return program, including 7,895 (37%) who had returned and 13,429 (62%) on a waiting list. Most of the returnees are from Mahama camp (7,633) and a small number from urban areas (262). It is expected that in 2021 UNHCR will facilitate the return of 40,000 refugees who wish to do so. UNHCR is not promoting repatriation to Burundi. Instead, it will continue to assist all refugees expressing their willingness to return to make an informed decision and voluntarily return to their country of origin, Burundi, in safety dignity.

By the end of 2021, it is anticipated that the Burundian refugee population will be approximately 28,919. Meanwhile, the use of space and basic infrastructures in Mahama camp is being rationalized and welcomed a growing number of DRC refugees relocated from areas at risk of landslides in Congolese camps.

Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM): In addition to the inter-agency Regional Response Plans for Congolese and Burundi situations, UNHCR has recently started to support refugees and asylum seekers from Libya to arrive in Rwanda as part of an Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM). The evacuation followed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the GoR, the African Union (AU), and UNHCR on 10 September 2019. Since the MoU signature, Rwanda

has received three flights in 2019 supporting the evacuation of 306 refugees and asylum-seekers and two flights in 2020 facilitating an additional 209 refugees and asylum seekers from Libya to Rwanda. Since then, two deaths and five new births have been recorded.

The 515 people of concern are from 6 nationalities – Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria. The evacuee population's average age is 23 years old, and around 50 percent are unaccompanied minors. Before evacuation from Libya, more than half of them were in detention centers, others in UNHCR Gathering and Departure Facilities, and few in urban areas. Thanks to the generosity of the Rwandan Government and the Rwandan people, the evacuees from Libya can enjoy a good protection environment in Rwanda and get access to essential humanitarian assistance services in Gashora Transit Center while durable solutions are being sought. Like other refugees hosted in Rwanda, the evacuees from Libya have the right to a safe refuge, including freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities. As part of finding durable solutions to them, More than 200 persons were resettled to Sweden, Canada, Norway, France, and 315 are still pending in the ETM center waiting for the implementation of durable solutions.

Rwandan returnees: Between 1994 and now, around 3.5 million Rwandans have repatriated, mainly from the DRC. From January to December 2020, some 794 Rwandans have voluntarily repatriated through Kijote and Nyarushishi Transit Centers. Returnee monitoring missions were conducted, and border monitoring/cross-border meetings took place parallel to the Transit Centers' management and the provision of essential humanitarian assistance services. These include reception, registration, provision of health insurance, cash and food assistance, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services, and transportation assistance to their areas of return. In 2021, the planning figure for Rwandan returnees is 3000 persons.

Operating environment

Rwanda has a National Asylum Law that complies with international standards, and refugees are included in the national birth registration system, decreasing the risks of statelessness.

The Government of Rwanda (GoR), through MINEMA, leads the refugee response in the country with UNHCR and partners providing direct operational support, capacity development, and technical advice to the local authorities.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MINAFFET), Directorate of Immigration/Emigration (DGIE), the National Identification Agency (NIDA), and the National Refugee Committee are also involved in the refugee response.

The Rwandan context offers an enabling environment for innovative responses and approaches for refugees based on its national systems and structures. In the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) framework, there have been some key

achievements toward refugees' social and economic inclusion and their integration in the national system, particularly in the areas of health and education. All refugees in urban settings and all refugee students in boarding schools have access to national health insurance. In parallel, the Government is leading a process of Strategic Planning for refugees' inclusion. The Government's integration scope is so far limited within the four commitments: promoting refugee access to documentation, refugee economic inclusion, and refugee integration in Education and Health's national system. One year after the historic adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) took place in December 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland, offering a critical opportunity to build momentum implementation of the GRF and strengthen collective responses to refugee situations. The Forum was a unique occasion for States and others to come together and announce bold, new measures to ease pressure on host countries, boost refugee self-reliance, and search for solutions. The GRF provided an opportunity for the Government of Rwanda (GoR) to showcase its achievements and mobilize support from a wide range of stakeholders towards its national refugee response. Building on these achievements, the GoR presented renewed pledges in health, education, documentation, refugees' socio-economic inclusion, and one new commitment to energy and environment sectors.

Achievements and gaps

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the UNHCR team deployed all necessary efforts to maintain a favorable protection environment for all Congolese refugees and continued advocating for services such as registration and documentation and prevention of refoulement, lifesaving assistance, including food and nutrition, healthcare, shelter and non-food items, water and sanitation services, education, livelihood and self-reliance and targeted support for the most vulnerable and those with specific needs.

Refugees in camps continued to receive cash for food assistance, and all refugees (100%) receive CBI assistance for NFI. Supplementary feedings were provided to all children under five years of age and other vulnerable groups, including people with chronic illness.

Response partners continue to provide health services to those in need with prioritized attention to the most vulnerable, including children, pregnant and lactating women, people with chronic illness, and the elderly (60+). All Primary Health Care services were accessible and free of charge to both refugees and local communities through the seven health centers/posts in the six refugee camps. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some health programs and activities were affected. The essential health services continued and followed strict infection prevention and control measures aligned with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO protocols. Outpatient consultation services were available to all refugees. Some five percent of the total outpatients were from the host community. The secondary and

tertiary medical referrals were also available through a referral mechanism between the camp-based health posts and referral or district hospitals. Immunization campaigns for children under-5 have continued with the observance of physical distancing and other infection control measures and achieved high coverage (100%) of measles vaccination. Congolese refugees had access to reproductive health and HIV/AIDs programs. All (100%) persons living with HIV were on antiretroviral therapy. Zero maternal death recorded, with 99% of child deliveries assisted by trained health staff. Outreach programs continued to engage refugees and raised awareness, primarily on preventing COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and positive behavioral changes, such as prompt health-seeking behavior in the event of an illness through the Community Health Workers (CHWs).

UNHCR and partners conducted training on COVID-19 for health care workers, CHWs, procurement of COVID-19 medicines and supplies, and establishment of quarantine and isolation facilities supported in collaboration with the district health teams. Moreover, refugees were recently integrated into the national viral hepatitis management by the Ministry of Health (MoH), hepatitis B and C screening, including treatment, were conducted and continued in all camps. Refugees in urban settings had access to the national Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) and accessed health services in public hospitals like nationals.

Even though COVID19 restriction measures resulted in school closures for over eight months in 2020, campaigns promoting schooling resulted in a slight increase in enrolment. Over 36,000 refugee students were integrated into national primary and secondary schools alongside the host community. This is number increased by 23,000 in 2020. In the meantime, local schools' capacity continues to be expanded through the construction of additional classrooms, the provision of school equipment and materials, and hiring and training of additional teachers. To further support refugees' access to education and their inclusion in national schools, UNHCR is developing 2021 a partnership with Profuturo/LaCaixa Foundation to provide access to connected learning in line with the Government of Rwanda Policy. This multi-year, innovative project will be aligned with the Government of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, to improve education quality using Information Community and Technology (ICT) to access connected educational learning materials of the national primary education curriculum. The project will benefit 14 national schools hosting refugee students.

Care arrangements for unaccompanied children, family reunification, friendly spaces for children and youth at risk remain limited. SGBV is one of the most significant protection concerns for refugee women and children. UNHCR and partners continued to work together to avail adequate child and youth-friendly spaces and equipment in all the camps. In 2020, one child-friendly space was built in every five Congolese camps to give children a safe space for development and leisure.

With the launch of the Voluntary Repatriation program for Burundian refugees, UNHCR assists refugees willing to opt for this durable solution and go back to their country of origin.

While refugees enjoy a generally favorable protection environment, the refugee camps' poor situation and lack of livelihood opportunities maintained a high dependency on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs.

Refugees registered in camp locations face arrest and detention risks if they move outside the camp without the requisite documents such as refugee IDs or Proof of registration and a letter authorizing their absence from the camp. Thus, there is a need for legal assistance and detention monitoring, and advocacy for greater freedom of movement of camp-based refugees.

In 2020 and early 2021, WFP faced again recurrent challenges to maintain the food pipeline, and should the funding levels not increase, ration cuts will occur as of March 2021 and might trigger tensions among refugees due to the existence of high dependency on humanitarian assistance and might lead to a push factor to increase the number of refugees returning to their home country, especially Burundian refugees in Mahama camp. In the meantime, UNHCR and WFP continued working on the targeting pilot project. The results of the profiling exercise conducted since 2020 should allow getting information on the refugee population's socio-economic profiling enabling better use of humanitarian assistance, including food and efficient livelihoods programming.

Most schools lack necessary infrastructures, like classrooms, libraries and laboratories, teachers, and supplies. All urban refugee children have the right to be enrolled in different national schools in and out of Kigali. By the end of 2020, we observed a gap of 200 classrooms in all the locations.

Most shelters in Congolese camps are very old, and camps are congested with no space for the camp extension, resulting in inadequate access roads or no fire breakpoints. Environmental damage and continuous erosion have resulted in the development of giant ravines that put refugees' shelters in "unsafe" conditions in Kiziba, Nyabiheke, Gihembe, and Kigeme camp. By the end of 2020, around 80% of refugees had adequate shelters. The operation focuses on relocating refugees whose shelters are in areas at risk of landslides to vacated shelters in Mahama camp voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees. So far, 942 refugees were relocated from Kigeme to Mahama camp between October 2020 and February 2021.

The supply of water remains below standards in Nyabiheke, Kigeme, and Gihembe camps. Advocacy efforts and investments are needed to upgrade and improve the reliability of water supply systems. Meanwhile, most of the access to sanitation facilities should be adapted for people with disabilities.

Access to electricity in shelters in camps remains very low, and more than 95 percent of households have

access to Tier 0-2 electricity services only. Reliance on candles and mobile phones for lighting were most common, and only a minority of families had access to either solar lanterns or solar home systems.

There are many business activities in the camp whose growth is constrained by a lack of energy access. The amenities most demanded by refugee households, lighting, entertainment, and mobile phone charging, are essential services provided by most solar home systems.

On 6 July, UNHCR was informed that two Congolese refugees from the Kigeme refugee camp had been tested positive for COVID-19. Three months later, 308 Covid-19 cases had been identified among refugees in Rwanda. Among the Congolese camps affected, we counted 93 cases, Kigeme (53), Kiziba (23), Nyabiheke (09), Mugombwa (07), and Gihembe (01). Of the identified cases, 98 percent of the affected Congolese refugees have recovered, and have two casualties had been recorded. As part of government prevention measures, the Kigeme refugee camp was placed in extended lockdown between March-May and July-August 2020.

With COVID-19, the schools have been closed since mid-March 2020 and re-opened in November 2020 following the Ministry of Education's expected decision. Suspension of education activities, child-friendly spaces, and community awareness due to COVID-19 has led to increased child neglect cases, SGBV related issues, and drug abuse among youth.

By the end of 2020, this protracted refugee population remains mainly dependent on humanitarian assistance due to limited livelihood opportunities. Almost the entire population is settled in congested refugee camps with aging health, WASH, and shelter infrastructure, which increase the risk of the spread of the virus.

The National Asylum Law provides refugees with the right to work, freedom of movement, and documentation access. Refugees can own property and engage in contracts, including land leases. In 2016, the GoR announced four commitments, including promoting refugees' economic opportunities to decrease reliance on humanitarian assistance. The fundamental right to work, combined with a relatively enabling environment, provides refugees with the opportunity to contribute economically to their host society. However, despite the favorable legal environment, challenges remained for refugees to become productive members of Rwandan society, including non-legal barriers, e.g., employer's attitude and limited awareness about refugees' right to work, insufficient access to financial services for refugee entrepreneurs, etc. By the end of 2020, only 16,975 refugees were engaged in income-generating activities. Due to the effects of COVID-19 on the regional economic situation, refugees were hit hardest, considering that they have only limited livelihood opportunities in hosting areas.

However, even though limited, UNHCR prioritizes this sector, which remains part of the GoR commitment presented at the GRF and has shown since 2019 concrete steps towards refugee socio-economic inclusion. As part of the Misizi Marshland project, funded by the IKEA Foundation, UNHCR collaborates with WFP, FAO, and MINEMA. The GoR improved food security, social cohesion, and income of 1,427 farmers by developing 55ha marshland availed by the Gisagara district. UNHCR, in conjunction with the partners, has identified an additional 100 Ha of lands with the authorities and received funding from the Government of Denmark for the replication of this project in two other districts hosting refugees, Gatsibo District for Nyabiheke camp and Nyamagabe District for Kigeme camp. In parallel, UNHCR is working with the GoR on revising the joint strategy on refugees' socio-economic inclusion 2017/2022.



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