

Group Resettlement of “1972 Burundians” from Tanzania

Quick Facts:

- The majority of 1972 Burundian refugees belong to the Hutu ethnic group
- About 80% of Burundian refugees are Christian. Many of the refugees are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, and Methodist. A small number practice Islam or traditional religions.
- Kirundi and French are the official languages of Burundi. All the persons included in this group speak and understand Kirundi. Many individuals speak Kiswahili after living in Tanzania. Well educated Burundians may speak French. Very few individuals speak or understand English.
- The group resettlement only targets 1972 Burundi refugees living in the UNHCR assisted refugee camps. The group is evenly divided between male and female.
- A sample taken indicated just over half of the resettlement group is under 18 years of age, and only 4% is 60 or above.
- The average family size is 5 people.
- Sixty-five percent of the households contain married couples.
- Traditional medicine is still practiced but free access to hospitals in the camps has reduced the number of people resorting to it.

General Description of the “1972 Burundians” in Tanzania

Burundi is a small country located in the Great Lakes region of Africa. It is bordered by Tanzania, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Burundi gained independence from Belgium in 1962. The population is estimated to be around six million, with 80% of the population living in rural areas. Burundi is the second most densely populated country in Africa.

The 1972 Burundian refugees targeted for resettlement is spread across eight UNHCR managed refugee camps in northwestern Tanzania. It is important to distinguish this population from the refugees who live in the Government adminis-

tered settlements in Tabora and Rukwa Regions. The settlement population, which has lived in Tanzania since 1972, and enjoys a degree of self-sufficiency, is not being proposed for resettlement.

Tanzania hosts the largest refugee population in Africa, a total of some 500,000 refugees, of whom 287,000 are assisted in the camps. Approximately 154,500 of the refugees living in camps are from Burundi.

The “1972 Burundians” are refugees primarily of Hutu ethnicity, who fled the widespread ethnic violence and cleansing which took place in Burundi between May and

August 1972. The events of 1972 are often recalled as the first “genocide” in the Great Lakes region. Reliable estimates place the death toll between 90,000 and 250,000 persons. Approximately 150,000 persons fled to the neighbouring countries of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC), Tanzania and Rwanda. In the aftermath, Hutu citizens were systematically repressed and their status as a group reduced to an underclass.

UNHCR submitted nearly 9,000 individuals belonging to the 1972 Burundian population to the US Government for resettlement consideration.



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Why Resettlement is Needed

Refugee rights and freedoms in Tanzania have been increasingly restricted since the passage of the 1998 Refugees Act and the introduction of the National Refugee Policy in 2003. The Act places restrictions on freedom of movement and employment possibilities, making local integration virtually impossible. The right to hold property and access to naturalization for refugees is restricted.

While more than 255,000 Burundian refugees have repatriated since 2002, UNHCR views the “1972 Burundians” living in camps as a unique group with distinct, continuing protection concerns, which make most unwilling or unable to return home. Having spent more than 30 years outside their country of origin, most born abroad, they have ac-

quired particular traits that distinguish them from other Burundians. They also bear the additional stigma of imputed political opinion, as the 1972 Burundians residing in the settlements in central Tanzania formed a radical opposition party. Access to land is also an impediment to repatriation and sustainable reintegration, and would likely be a source of conflict and displacement were they to return.

The 1972 Burundian refugees have survived and persevered through one of the most protracted refugee situations globally. The refugees who fled the widespread ethnic violence in Burundi in 1972 and now reside in the refugee camps in northwestern Tanzania have lived outside their country of origin for some thirty-five years. Refugee children and adoles-

cents, and now a substantial number of adults, have known nothing other than camp and settlement life, either in Rwanda, DRC or Tanzania. All are dependent on UNHCR for even the most basic necessities, such as food, water and shelter. In Tanzania, they are unable to fully enjoy basic rights.

UNHCR went from a phase of facilitation to active promotion of repatriation to Burundi in 2006. Burundi’s turbulent and violent past still looms large in the minds of the Burundian refugees and the continuing pattern of human rights abuses justifies their reluctance to return. Local integration is not an option offered by the host government; the Tanzanian Government views their asylum as temporary, and considers repatriation, whenever possible, to be the appropriate durable solution for the Burundians.

Resettlement Considerations

According to the 1972 Burundian refugee leaders from one camp, ethnicity is less an issue than a person’s ability to speak Kiswahili, Kirundi, or Kinyarwanda. Ethnicity has been used divisively as a political tool in Burundi. The refugees would gladly leave ethnic considerations behind.

Nuclear families live in the same single house. Members of nuclear families are supposed to be economically independent from the extended family. However, strong social ties exist within the extended family, which is considered the nexus of solidarity within the community. People feel strong ties to cousins, nieces, and nephews. Uncles and aunts often assume care and responsibility for their siblings’ children. Families may also be caring for children from their extended family.

There are certain to be cases of Burundian women and girls who have been

the victims of sexual or domestic violence who are being resettled. Registration data suggests that approximately 15% of the households are headed by single women. Women without the support of a husband, brother, or other male family members will need additional support to become self-sufficient and integrate. Young girls between 13 and 16 years are sometimes forced into marriages, so that parents who are in desperate economic circumstances can obtain a dowry.

Women and girls carry the work load of the home. Burundi society is a traditional and patriarchal one, in which women have more duties than rights and are expected to subordinate themselves to male family members. Access to social services and employment in the camp, however, has benefited a number of refugee women and allowed them to overcome traditional obstacles.

Men are seen as the natural heads of their households and in the community. The *bashingantahe*, or council of elders, composed of religious leaders and prominent personalities mediate minor conflicts within the community. Camp leadership has required an equal division between men and women.

Burundian refugees from Tanzania have been resettled to the US in relatively small numbers since the mid-1990s. Communities of Burundian refugees can be found throughout the US. However, the members of this group are not likely to have close family connections in the US. The refugee leaders expressed a preference to be resettled in places where the climate and environment resembles that in Burundi and Tanzania. In other words, they prefer mild weather and small, rural towns.

Educational and Vocational Background



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As is the case in Burundi, most of the Burundians come from rural areas. Except for camp restrictions on agriculture activities and the raising of livestock, the refugees have maintained the general aspects of their previous life: they construct mud houses for shelter; collect firewood for cooking; keep small gardens and raise small animals like ducks and chickens; and practice their traditional customs. Samples of the registration data show that the members of the group are almost entirely farmers and students.

At the same time, UNHCR and NGOs regularly hire refugees to work as social workers, teachers, security guards and medical personnel. Refugees also engage in trades such as carpentry, tailoring, shoe and bicycle repair, and petty business. Vocational training unfortunately only benefits approximately a third of those who are interested in the opportunity to learn a trade. Income generating activities are minimal and small scale.

The lifestyle of well educated and urban Burundians has suffered from exile; most of them do not work in their professions; they may earn a very small amount of money from their employers; and they have very few opportunities to pursue higher education or additional training.



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Education in the camps follows the Burundi curriculum. In the camps, most refugee children (over 97%) have benefited from free primary education. The ratio between girls and boys is almost equal in lower grades; however, girls start dropping out when they reach higher grades and very few manage to complete post primary education, which is not funded by UNHCR. Approximately 20% of the refugee population is literate.

Given conditions of life in Burundi before departure and conditions of life in the camps, Burundian refugees are unlikely to know how to operate modern appliances or machinery.



UNHCR is the U.N. Agency charged with protecting and assisting the world's refugees and finding long-term solutions. Currently, UNHCR is responsible for nearly 21 million people, including 8.4 million refugees; 6.6 million internally displaced persons, 773,500 asylum seekers, 2.4 million stateless people, and 1.1 million returnees.

For further information or to request materials:
 UNHCR Washington
 1775 K Street NW
 Suite 300
 Washington, DC 20006
 Phone: 202-296-5191
 Fax: 202-296-5660
 E-mail: usawa@unhcr.org