

4 March 2015

## BURUNDI

# Guarded optimism that long-term IDPs may achieve durable solutions

As of January 2015, up to 77,600 Burundians continue to live in protracted displacement, mainly in settlements in central and northern Burundi. They were displaced by inter-ethnic and inter-communal violence following a *coup d'état* in 1993 and subsequent fighting between government forces and armed groups. Security has improved since the last armed group laid down its arms in 2008. Concerns remain that tensions in neighbouring countries could increase the numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees. Burundi remains among the world's poorest countries, currently ranked 180 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index ([UNDP, 2014](#)).

The enormous challenges for all Burundians in accessing healthcare, education and livelihoods are even greater for IDPs and former IDPs, including those who have returned to places of origin.

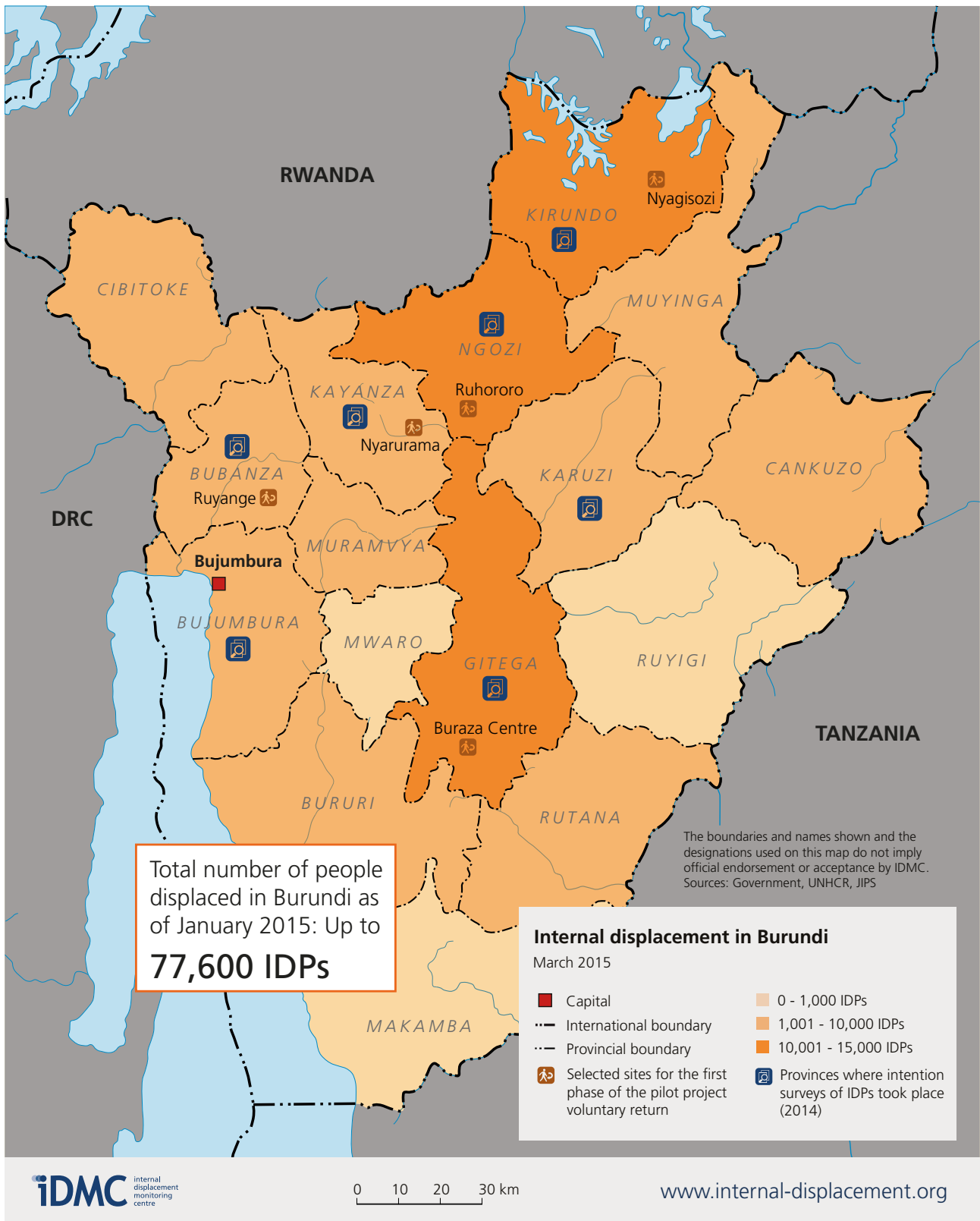
The government and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have launched a pilot project to support returns of IDPs which has already benefited to at least 1,300 IDPs. The majority of IDPs wish to integrate locally and achieve durable solutions in their place of displacement (unpublished report, MNSDPH and UNHCR, July 2014, on file with IDMC). For many IDPs, concerns about security, access to services and livelihoods prevent return to places of origin.

The government belatedly established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in May 2014, mandated to investigate the inter-ethnic massacres that occurred between 1962 and 2008, identify perpetrators and promote reconciliation. In addition, in September 2014 it created a judicial body to address land issues.

There is tension in the run-up to June 2015 presidential, parliamentary and local elections, amid speculation that the current president, Pierre Nkurunziza, might seek a third term despite constitutional limitations allowing only two. The elections could mark an important turning point in consolidating peace and democracy but also have potential to trigger fresh displacement.



Woman IDP leader and her child in the Bubanza province, north-west part of the country. Photo: B. McCallin/IDMC, November 2011



Map by: IDMC

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## Background and causes of displacement

In 1993, the assassination of Burundi's first elected president, Melchior Ndaday, a Hutu, triggered massacres and large-scale displacement within Burundi and to neighbouring countries. The majority of the first IDPs were ethnic Tutsis from the northern and central provinces, who were targeted by Hutu rebel groups or who feared retaliation from neighbours. Both Hutu and Tutsi civilians were subsequently targeted by the army and other armed groups. The conflict was fuelled by regional events, particularly the genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994 and two major wars in the 1990s in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and also by economic inequalities.

In the late 1990s a Tutsi-led government twice ordered the relocation of hundreds of thousands of (mostly Hutu) civilians into camps as part of a military strategy to defeat rebel groups. The number of IDPs peaked in 1999 at over 800,000 people, or around 12 per cent of the population ([UN CAP](#), November 1999). Camps were dismantled between 1998 and 2000, forcing people to return home despite insecurity, but other IDP settlements remained ([UN](#), February 2000). The 2000 Arusha agreement led to a transitional power-sharing government.

Large-scale displacement continued, however, as the army fought two rebel groups which had not joined the peace process. In 2003, the larger of the two, the Hutu group known as the National Council for the Defence of Democracy - Forces for the Defence of Democracy (known by the French acronym FDD-CNDD) signed a ceasefire agreement. The resulting improvement in security enabled tens of thousands of IDPs to return home ([OCHA](#), May 2005). By the time of the ceasefire agreement, an estimated 300,000 people, mostly civilians, had been killed due to the conflict ([ICG](#), October 2003).

A national unity government headed by Pierre Nkurunziza, a Hutu and former head of FDD, was elected in August 2005. The last remaining rebel group, the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People - National Liberation Forces (known by the French acronym Palipehutu-FNL), fought on before signing a comprehensive ceasefire agreement with the government in September 2006. However, insecurity and displacement continued until Palipehutu - FNL returned to the negotiating table in April 2008. Following talks, the group's leaders renounced the use of arms and registered the FNL as a political party ([UNSC](#), 22 May 2009).

Relatively peaceful presidential elections in June 2010 gave a second mandate to Nkurunziza. No new conflict-induced displacement has occurred since 2008. IDPs are reported to have had no problems participating in the 2010 elections. The next presidential elections are to be held in June 2015 and tensions have been rising since 2013. They have been fuelled by rumours that Nkurunziza may seek a third mandate, despite constitutional prohibitions on serving more than two terms ([IRIN](#), January 2015).

## Displacement figures

Most of the over 800,000 IDPs at the height of the crisis in 1999 have returned, locally integrated or settled elsewhere. Based on results of a nationwide profiling exercise carried out by the government and partners in 2011, it is estimated that as of January 2015, up to 77,600 IDPs still lived in protracted displacement, located in some 119 settlements in 15 provinces, most in the north and centre ([JIPS](#), 2012).

Between August and December 2014 at least 1,300 IDPs returned home (email with UNHCR, January 2015). Further falls in IDP numbers are likely as additional displaced families have indicated an intention to return.

In December 2013, the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender (*Ministère de la Solidarité Nationale, des Droits de la Personne Humaine et du Genre* - MSNDPH) and UNHCR initiated a pilot project for returns, starting with a voluntary return phase. As part of intention surveys, they gathered data on more than 15,900 IDPs, 16 per cent of the 78,900 then still displaced at the beginning of the project. This data revealed that half of IDPs are under 18 years old, in line with the 2011 profiling results and slightly less than the proportion of children in the 2008 national census (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR, July 2014, on file with IDMC; [ISTEEB](#), 2008).

In terms of distribution by sex, there is no difference between the displaced population and the overall population. Female IDPs slightly outnumber men ([JIPS](#), 2012; unpublished report, UNHCR, July 2014; [UN](#), January 2015).

IDP estimates do not include people displaced by natural hazards, such as floods, which are an occasional risk. In February 2014, heavy rains displaced nearly 12,500 people. As of January 2015, there was no public information available on whether they had returned or remain displaced ([IFRC](#), February 2014).

## Assistance and protection needs

Burundi's poverty levels remain daunting. It has one of the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the world as well as one of the highest hunger rates ([European Parliament](#), October 2014). Burundi is ranked 180 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index, demonstrating the scale of challenges facing Burundians seeking access to healthcare, education and employment ([European Parliament](#), October 2014; [UNDP](#), 2014). These are even greater for IDPs, former IDPs, including those who have returned to places of origin. The July 2014 report showed 43 per cent of displaced children were not attend-

ing school. Fewer than 30 per cent of children are enrolled in primary school ([UNICEF](#), December 2013). The main reasons why IDP children do not attend include inability to pay education fees (29 per cent), lack of interest (18 per cent) and child labour (six per cent) (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR, July 2014).

Eighty eight per cent of those interviewed for the 2013 intentions survey reported having involvement in agricultural activities, both before and in their displacement. While displaced, more IDPs (ten per cent) engage in casual labour (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR, July 2014). When asked what kind of vocational training they would prefer, the most frequently mentioned options were sewing (17.4 per cent) and animal husbandry (13.9 per cent).

Access to healthcare remains difficult for some IDPs, with 19.2 per cent reported to not possess a national health insurance card (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR, July 2014).

The Batwa – a minority ethnic group who comprise one per cent of the population – suffer frequent discrimination and have poor access to land, education and healthcare ([OHCHR](#), no date; [Avocats Sans Frontières](#), June 2013). Data on the IDP population is not disaggregated by ethnicity, thus preventing analysis of the extent of discrimination suffered by Batwa IDPs.

## Durable solutions

The majority of IDPs wish to integrate locally and achieve durable solutions in their place of displacement (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR, July 2014). Of those interviewed in 2014, 79.4 per cent wish to integrate locally and only 6.8 per cent to return. For many IDPs, return is not possible due to insecurity and uncertainty around access to livelihoods and basic services in areas of origin (unpublished report, MSNDPH and UNHCR,

July 2014). The proportion of interviewees who now wish to integrate locally has declined since 2011 when 85 per cent chose to do so. The percentage of IDPs wishing to settle elsewhere has also dropped. The modest increase in the number seeking return to places of origin reflects improved security in some locations.

As a result of this first phase of the project led by UNCHR and MSNDPH, at least 1,300 IDPs returned in 2014 and others are currently in the process of returning. The project will continue with activities such as the construction of shelters, distribution of return kits to meet IDPs' basic needs and further assessment of return areas. Partners are to prepare an advocacy document based on the results of the pilot project in order to foster the effective integration of returnees and ensure that the project is replicated in remaining sites. Both intention surveys and registrations will continue in the remaining displacement sites during the rest of 2015 and 2016.

The search for durable solutions has been further complicated by the forced returns of Burundian refugees and migrants from abroad, including 36,100 from Tanzania in 2013 ([IFRC](#), 2015). At least 65 per cent of these returnees were women and children. Many arrived without belongings and land or ties with remaining family in Burundi. They are living in camps or with host families.

## National and international response

In December 2013, the first phase of the MSNDPH/UNHCR-led pilot project to support returns focusing on voluntary return started, initially registering IDPs and their intentions in 18 sites. Due to operational and budget constraints, only five sites were selected for the first phase, Bubanza, Kayanza, Gitega, Ngozi and Kirundo. Several local actors have been involved such as the Project to support Repatriation and

Reintegration of Burundian Victims (Projet d'Appui au Rapatriement et à la Réintégration des Sinistrés, PARESI), the Development and Education Council (Conseil pour l'Éducation et le Développement, COPED) and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). These organisations have been involved in gathering data on IDPs and their challenges, assessing return areas and building and rehabilitating shelter for returnees. They have organised workshops to reinforce social cohesion in return areas and tried to identify local conflict resolution mechanisms to solve land and other disputes.

In March 2010, the government adopted a Socio-economic Reintegration Strategy for People Affected by the Conflict, which takes into account several population groups including IDPs. The strategy states that IDPs are able to choose their preferred place of residence, meaning they can freely choose between return, local integration or settlement elsewhere. The Ministry of National Solidarity, Refugee Return and Social Reintegration is charged with implementing the strategy. To help do so it has established a forum of dialogue and programming, the Sectorial Group for Community Recovery, Repatriation and Reintegration (known by the French acronym GSRCCR) which is co-chaired by UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) ([MSNDPH](#), October 2013). The strategy was initially meant to conclude in 2014 but is apparently still on-going.

Fourteen years after the signing of the [Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi](#) in 2000 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was finally established in May 2014 ([National Assembly](#), December 2014). In December 2014, the National Assembly elected 11 commissioners, with six Hutu, four Tutsi and one Batwa representative ([National Assembly](#), December 2014). The commission is mandated to investigate the inter-ethnic massacres that occurred between 1962 and 2008, identify perpetrators and promote reconciliation ([RFI](#), December 2014).

In 2006, the government established a land commission, the National Commission for Land and Other Possessions (known by the French acronym CNTB) to find solutions for people who had lost land and possessions during the conflict. As of November 2013, it had handled some 38,000 land complaints and continues to adjudicate outstanding cases ([IRIN](#), November 2013). Land disputes are common in Burundi, especially between IDPs and former refugees who have returned from Tanzania and Uganda. Land access is particularly important as 90 per cent of the population depend on agriculture ([ICG](#), February 2014). Pressure to solve land disputes has further increased since 2013 as a result of waves of forced returns of refugees and migrants.

Decisions made by the CNTB have since 2013 increasingly favoured repatriated refugees over IDPs and local residents ([IRIN](#), November 2013). There could be renewed ethnic tensions if the rights of IDPs and repatriating refugees to access and own land are not secured ([ICG](#), February 2014).

In September 2014, law n°1/26 established a body to address land issues. The Special Court (Cour Spéciale des Terres et Autres Biens) is the only institution of appeal against decisions made by the CNTB ([National Assembly](#), September 2014). There are fears about its functions and risks it may undermine restitution reconciliation efforts ([ICG](#), February 2014). Both the CNTB and the Special Court need to treat cases without regard to the ethnicity of the claimants.

Burundi has ratified the *Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region* and its protocols. It has signed, but not ratified, the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (the Kampala Convention).

International assistance provided at the height of Burundi's displacement crisis has steadily declined in recent years. At the end of 2014, the UN Office in Burundi (established in 2011 to replace the UN Integrated Office in Burundi), terminated its mandate to help the government strengthen the independence, capacities and legal frameworks of key national institutions and transferred its other responsibilities to the UN Country Team ([BNUB](#), no date). In January 2015, the UN Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi (MENUB) started work to provide assistance and report on the presidential, parliamentary and local elections scheduled for June 2015.

Burundi, beyond the forthcoming elections, faces numerous challenges with regards to internal displacement and providing services to its population. There is a tremendous need to invest in infrastructure, health, education and employment creation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission may help heal some ongoing scars from the bitter internal conflict and promote social cohesion and reconciliation between ethnic groups. It is hoped that the CNTB can help defuse tensions over land disputes in this over-crowded country. While the elections could consolidate the transition to peace and democracy, there is a fear they may trigger further displacement.

## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) is the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement. For the millions of people worldwide displaced within their own country, IDMC plays a unique role as a global monitor and evidence-based advocate to influence policy and action by governments, UN agencies, donors, international organisations and NGOs.

IDMC was established in 1998 at the request of the Interagency Standing Committee on humanitarian assistance. Since then, IDMC's unique global function has been recognised and reiterated in annual UN General Assembly resolutions.

IDMC is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an independent, non-governmental humanitarian organisation.

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