

Since 2017, UNHCR has facilitated the voluntary repatriation¹ of more than 210,000 Burundians, from Tanzania (above 147,000), Rwanda (above 31,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (above 14,000), Uganda (above 14,000) and other countries.² However, Burundi remains one of the least developed countries in the world and although the political climate has improved,³ the social system remains porous and fragile. Against the backdrop of socio-economic difficulties and humanitarian funding challenges, this snapshot attempts to shed light on the reintegration experiences of Burundian returnees, focusing on the main challenges upon return, economic and social integration, assistance needs and intentions for the future.

Key findings

- Upon return, returnees most often faced challenges around finding housing (74%) and accessing food and water (49%).
- Returnees feel physically safe and secure in Burundi (85%), but economically insecure (48%). Economic vulnerabilities appeared higher among women returnees.
- Returnees in Makamba have access to income generating activities (91%), while those in Muyinga (18%) and Ruyigi (16%) do not. However, all are unable to cover all their household needs.
- Primary needs among returnees remain basic necessities (food, water, clothes) (78%) and housing (71%), even 6 months or more after return.
- Returnees are not planning to migrate away from their current locations in Burundi in the next 12 months (91%).

¹ It is important to note that the voluntariness of returns is a complex issue, given that constraints such as strict encampment policies, a lack of livelihood opportunities and limited standards for critical service delivery (e.g. education and shelter) for refugees and migrants, to name a few, call into question the voluntariness of returns under such severe conditions.

² UNHCR (2023). [Burundi Situation – Burundian refugees in the region, 30 June 2023](#).

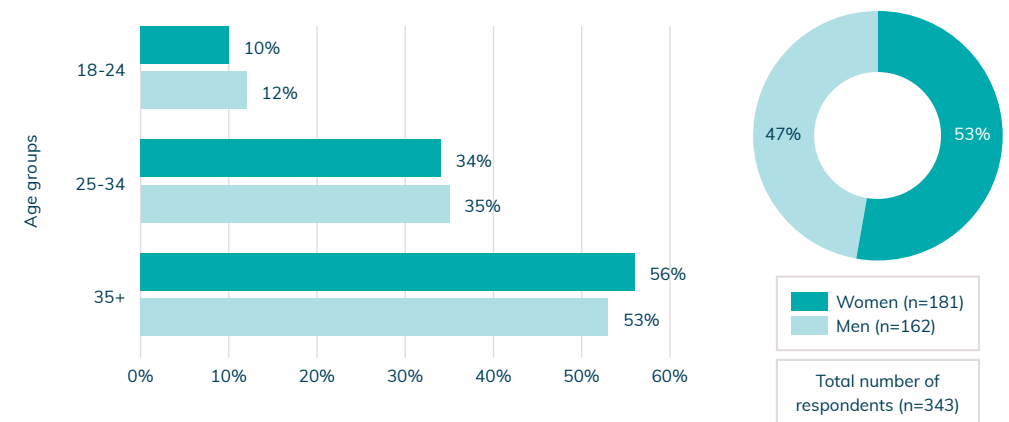
³ IOM (2023). [Burundi – Stability Index Round 1 \(May 2023\)](#).

Data and profiles

This snapshot draws on 343 4Mi Return surveys conducted in April 2023 with Burundian respondents who had returned to Burundi between 6 months and 2 years from the date of interview.⁴ 18% of respondents had spent less than two years abroad, 35% had spent between two and five years and 47% had spent more than 5 years abroad. The majority of respondents had returned from Tanzania (73%), followed by Uganda (13%), Rwanda (8%) the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) (4%) and Kenya (1%).

Just over half (53%) were women and aged 35 or older (55%) (Figure 1). Education attainment levels were low, as most had not completed any schooling (54%) and 41% had completed only primary school.

Figure 1. Sex and age of respondents



⁴ The purposive sampling strategy ensured respondents were also not engaged in cyclical/seasonal migration across the border, but rather had moved out of Burundi and returned on one occasion.

Map 1. Provinces of data collection

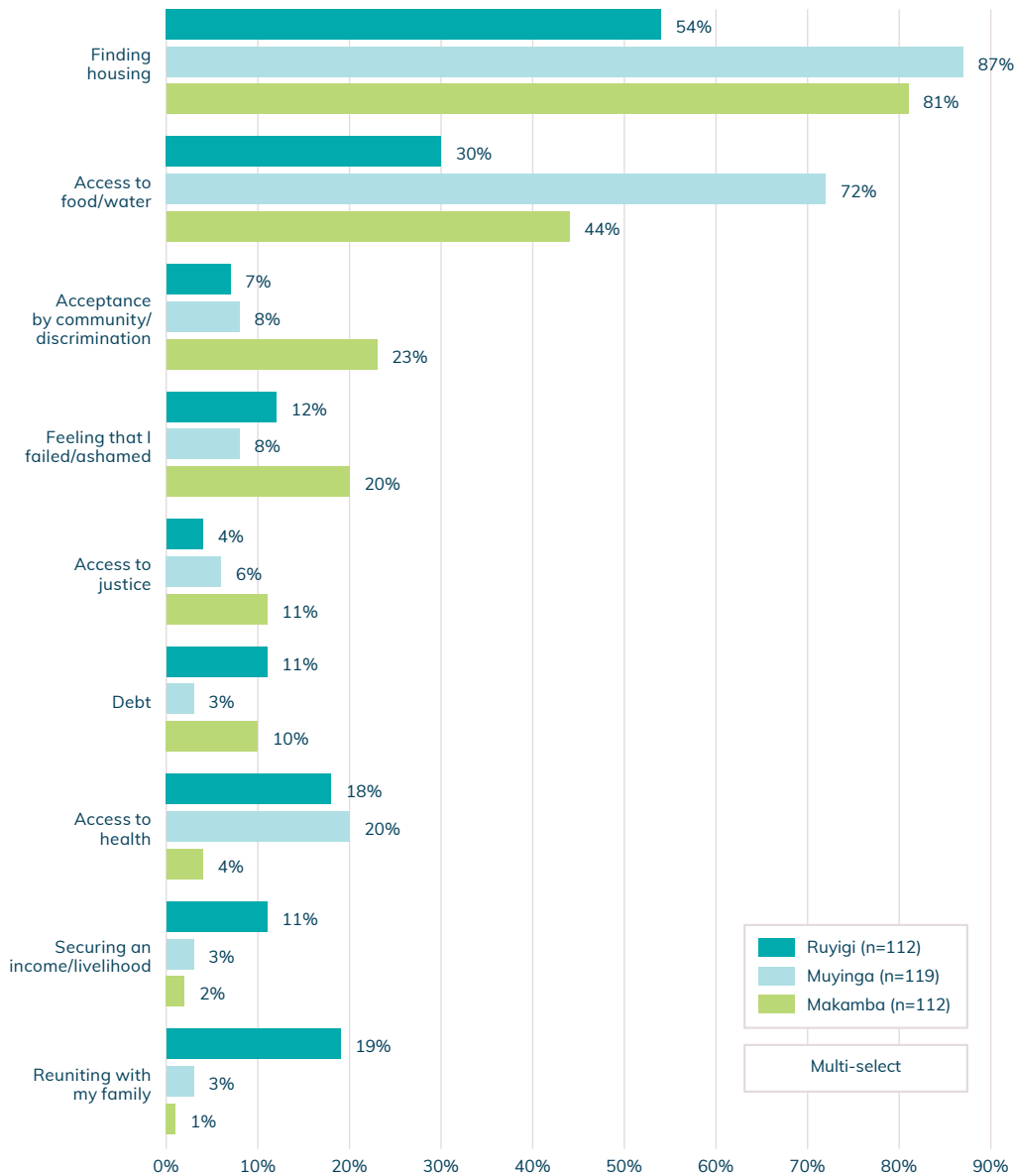


Respondents were interviewed in three provinces: Muyinga (35%), Ruyigi (33%) and Makamba (33%). Respondents most often returned to the provinces they were from (81%) or where they had stayed before leaving (10%); 9% had returned to somewhere completely new. In Makamba, a higher proportion of respondents were women (70%), compared to Muyinga (55%) and Ruyigi (33%), possibly due to many men being engaged in fishing activities in Makamba while enumerators visited the location. Respondents in Makamba were also older (63% were 35 or older) than in Muyinga (56%) and Ruyigi (45%). While close to all respondents interviewed in Ruyigi had returned from Tanzania (96%), respondents in Makamba also included returns from DR Congo (12%) and those interviewed in Muyinga included many returns from Uganda (36%) and Rwanda (23%), in large part reflecting the vicinity of the provinces to neighbouring countries. The differences among respondents in each province should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

Upon return, most challenges revolved around finding housing and accessing food and water

Housing was the most frequently cited challenge upon return for respondents in all three provinces. In Muyinga, a majority also indicated challenges in accessing food and water (72%). In Makamba, returnees faced challenges related to acceptance by the community (23%) and feelings of failure and shame (20%) more than those in other provinces. This may stem from the high share of women respondents in Makamba and/or respondents having spent more time outside of Burundi: 64% spent more than 5 years abroad, compared to 38% in Muyinga and Ruyigi. Additionally, when asked to describe the strength of ties with family and friends since return, 42% of respondents in Makamba said these were strong, while 87% and 81% did so in Muyinga and Ruyigi.

Figure 2. What were your major challenges upon arrival in Burundi?

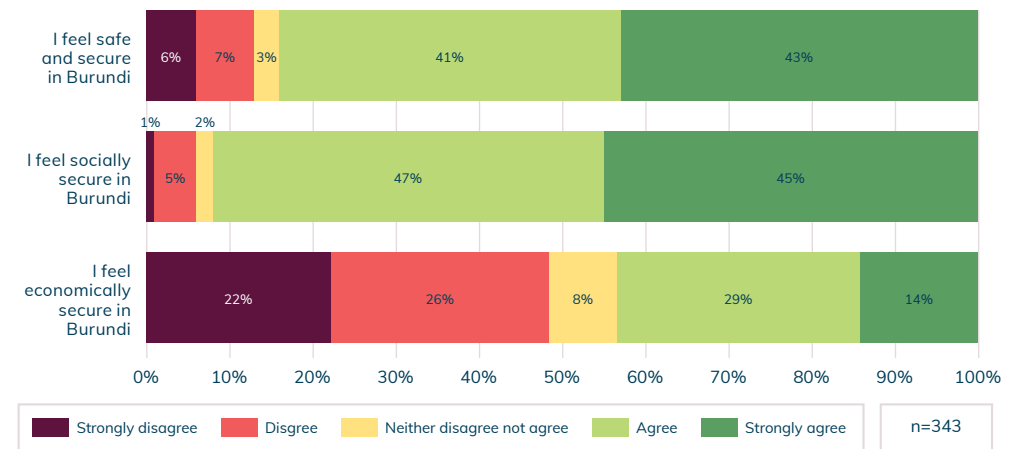


The data suggest a need for programming that supports access to basic needs such as housing, food and water and that helps strengthen returnees' social or communal ties in these provinces and targets the specific stigma that women returnees can face. Existing research highlights the link between feelings of stigma and marginalization and the psycho-social needs of returnees.⁵

Returnees feel physically safe and secure in Burundi, but economically insecure

84% of returnees felt physically safe and secure⁶ in Burundi and 92% felt socially secure. Feelings of physical safety and security were slightly less prevalent among women (78%) than men (91%). In terms economic security, the sample was split between 43% feeling secure, 8% neither secure nor insecure and 48% feeling insecure. Women more often felt economically insecure (57%) compared to men (38%), irrespective of the province of interview. These data highlight the potential need for reintegration programming to target economic vulnerabilities and to understand the specific vulnerabilities of female returnees.

Figure 3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement?



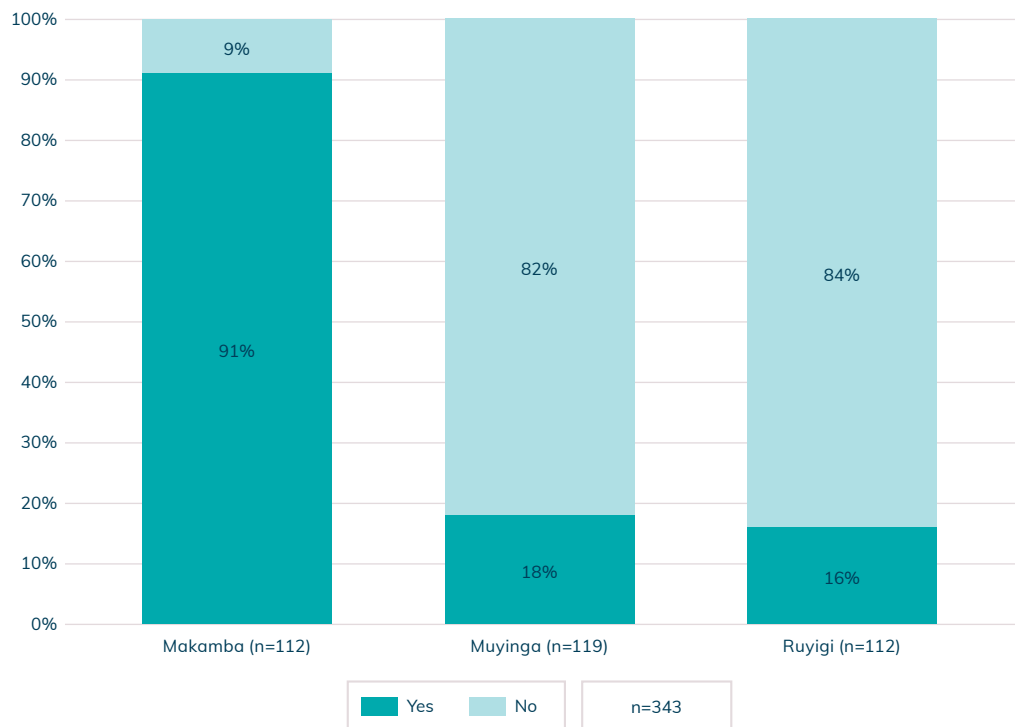
⁵ MMC (2023). [Mind the Information Gap. Access to information and assistance of Ethiopian returnees throughout their migration journey.](#)

⁶ Enumerators were not previously known to survey respondents and, hence, it is possible that some respondents did not feel comfortable disclosing feelings of physical insecurity. The results should therefore be treated with caution as they may over-estimate feelings of physical safety and security. It is also important to consider that this sample of respondents is composed of individuals who had returned to Burundi and did not re-migrate nor intended to do so (as presented later in the snapshot), suggesting they may not feel vulnerable to physical insecurities that other Burundians may feel vulnerable to, particularly those who did not return or did so and then re-migrated.

Returnees in Makamba have access to income, while those in Muyinga and Ruyigi do not. However, all are unable to cover household needs

Most returnees interviewed in Makamba were earning an income at time of interview (91%). Conversely, most respondents in Muyinga (18%) and Ruyigi (16%) were not. The villages targeted in Makamba were near Lake Tanganyika and close to the main road to Makamba city, improving access to markets as well as income from fishing (86% of working respondents in Makamba worked in agriculture/fishing). The villages targeted in Ruyigi and Muyinga, on the other hand, were rural and far from markets, limiting activities to subsistence agriculture. Reintegration programming should therefore target the specific needs of returnees in different geographical locations and consider what kinds of development interventions might improve the livelihood outcomes of returnees and their wider communities.

Figure 4. Are you currently making money?



Although most respondents in Makamba cited earning an income, 98% outlined that their household income did not meet their needs. This was the case for 96% of respondents in Ruyigi and 76% in Muyinga. In this way, development assistance as part of longer-term reintegration programming appeared as a need for all surveyed returnees, regardless of their location in Burundi.

Primary needs among returnees remain basic necessities (food, water, clothes) and housing, even six months or more after return

The need for assistance was stated by all interviewees, with most citing multiple needs. Basic needs support (78%), help to find housing (71%) and help to start a business (57%) were the most cited forms of assistance. The data reveal that, even after 6 months or more after return, most returnees have not been able to secure some of the most basic necessities. In Muyinga, the vast majority (90%) needed housing. In Ruyigi, unconditional cash support was cited by more than half (54%) of respondents. Men more commonly identified cash support (43%) and help finding jobs (36%), while women more often identified education (28%) and legal assistance (17%).

Returnees are not planning to leave their current locations in Burundi in the next 12 months

Most respondents intended to remain in Burundi and in their current location (90%) in the next 12 months. Others had not yet decided (7%) or mentioned wanting to move somewhere else within Burundi (2%). No respondents mentioned intending to move outside Burundi. These intentions may change as respondents continue to experience challenges in securing incomes and livelihoods in country. UN agencies and NGOs working with returnees should consult returnees further on their needs in their location of return and engage in longer-term follow-up on needs and intentions.

Figure 5. Are you in need of assistance now?

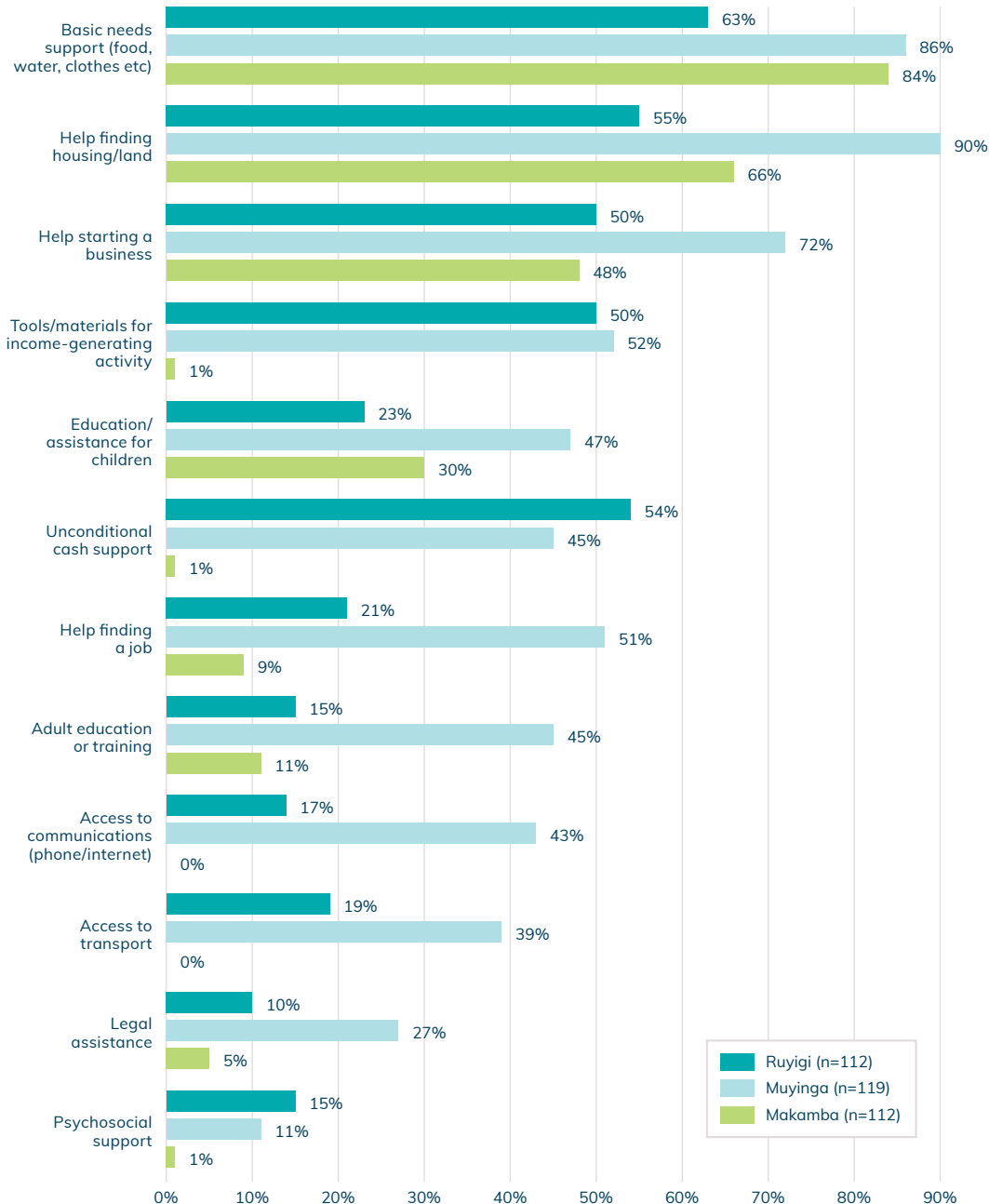
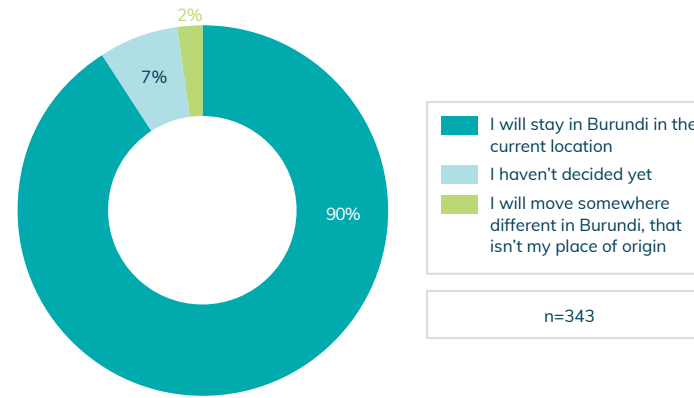


Figure 6. What is your plan in terms of movement for the next 12 months?



4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in Eastern and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at:

www.mixedmigration.org/4mi