

BURUNDI

Burundi is a densely populated country of approximately 9 million and borders Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Tanzania. It has many similarities with its neighbour, Rwanda.

Diversity

The official languages of Burundi are Kirundi and French. All of the Burundians displaced in 1972, including those who have spent their entire lives outside of Burundi, speak and understand Kirundi. Also, many have picked up Kiswahili from living in Tanzania.

Burundi's major ethnic groups include the Bahutu/Hutu (about 7.21 million), the Batutsi/Tutsi (about 1.2 million), and a smaller population of Batwa/Twa (about 30,000–40,000). The Twa are thought to be descended from the original forest-dwelling inhabitants of Burundi and nearby region. Hutus and Tutsi are believed to have migrated to present day Burundi and the surrounding region centuries ago. Tutsis and Hutus have coexisted in Burundi and the surrounding region for centuries and presently share a common language and many similar values, cultural practices, and traditions. As a result of the conflict and turmoil between the two groups and the desire to unite and reconcile, some Burundis will self-identify as being Burundi or Burundian, rather than Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa.

Burundian refugee characteristics:

- About 40% of Burundian refugees have had no schooling, and 20% are illiterate.
- The majority of refugees are Christian. Most are Protestant, and about 20% are Catholic. A small percent of the Burundian refugees from 1972 are Muslim.
- Burundian society is traditionally patriarchal in nature.

References

- Minority Rights Group International, World Directory of Minority and Indigenous Peoples, Burundi. <www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4703>.
- Ntahombay, P. & Nduwayo, G. (2007). Identity and Cultural Diversity in Conflict Resolution and Democratisation for the African Renaissance: The Case of Burundi. African Journal on Conflict Resolution; Vol 7, No 2 (2007).

I remember hearing gun shots close to our home and we would hear of attacks in nearby places. We did not feel safe living in Burundi and we wanted peace. So we left again, but this time to Rwanda.

We travelled by bus, north to Rwanda to a refugee camp outside the capital city, Kigali. My father joined us in Rwanda. Life was very difficult.

Burundian people were allowed to have their own small businesses in Tanzania but not in Rwanda.

For a while, we tried to live in Kigali but there wasn't any work for either of my parents and we couldn't live there because we feared being arrested. We decided to return to the camp because we couldn't go back to Burundi. My father got some money for working as a soccer coach and playing soccer. There was a small shop in the camp where my mother was able to sell some things. Life was still difficult because we were starting life all over again. We lived in a tent in the Kigali camp. In the camp there wasn't very much peace. It was not very safe.



© Georgia B. Travers/International Rescue Committee. January 2, 2012. Muyinga Province, BURUNDI—Two kindergartners enjoy their serving of “bouillie,” a floury porridge provided every morning at schools in Gasorwe Refugee Camp in Burundi’s eastern province of Muyinga. The breakfast provides a major incentive for many of the children to attend school. <www.rescue.org/blog/photo-share-breakfast-school>.Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Civil War and Conflict

Burundi has experienced civil problems since they gained independence from Belgium in 1962. In both Burundi and Rwanda, conflict and competition for power between the Tutsi and Hutu populations has led to civil war and mass killings. The minority Tutsi have largely dominated the political and economic life of Burundi, including the armed forces, police and judiciary, business, and news media.

Violent conflict has repeatedly broken out. In 1972, 200,000 Burundians were killed in the violence and 150,000 fled to neighbouring Rwanda, The Republic of Congo, and Tanzania (which has historical links with Tanzania since the 1600s). The 1972 Burundian refugees living in Rwanda later fled to Tanzania after the outbreak of genocide in that country. Conflict in 1978–79 and again during the civil war of 1993–2004 that resulted from the assassination of Burundi's Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, led to further mass migrations and killings. An estimated 300,000 plus people were killed during the civil war. Most Burundian refugees are of Hutu ethnicity

In 2005, Burundi held the first local and national elections since 1993. The largely Hutu National Council for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD) emerged as the country's largest party. While Burundi's civil war officially ended in 2005, it has remained in a state of political upheaval and violent conflict. Violence between rival groups has continued to erupt from time to time since the elections of 2010.

Some of the Burundian refugees in Rwanda were urban refugees living in Kigali and other urban areas. Most sought asylum in the Kigeme refugee camps and others near the border with Burundi. Many of these camps are now home to Congolese refugees. The majority of Burundian refugees now live in Tanzania, in one of three different refugee camps: Ngara in the north, Kibondo in the country's central region, and Kasulu in the south.

Many Burundians have spent most, if not all of their lives in exile. If they were to return, many no longer know where their family's land is located and much of the land owned by those who were forced to flee has been repossessed by the government.

References

- Burundi-Tanzania Refugees face mounting pressure to go home. Retrieved from <www.irinnews.org/Report/94945/BURUNDI-TANZANIA-Refugees-face-mounting-pressure-to-go-home>.
- Freedom House (2012). Freedom in the World 2012—Burundi. Retrieved from <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/burundi#.VRAQuW6Ei70>>.

School

We moved to Rwanda when I was 13. I attended my first school when I was 14, in Kigali, Rwanda. I only attended school for about 1 ½ years because I got sick with heart disease and stomach problems. I wasn't strong enough to continue studying.

My class in the school had about fifty students and one teacher. There were not enough materials for everyone, so we had to share the resources. We sat at long tables, usually three to four students at one table. There were three or four classrooms in the school in total. I was put in a class with other teenagers of similar age. I don't think that the teachers in the school were well educated, but they tried their best to teach us. But, overall, I did not learn much when I attended that school.



© B. Bannon/UNHCR. Photo ID 3096891522. October 24, 2008. TANZANIA: A choice, finally. Lukama Village, where some Burundi refugees have been given the chance to stay and have found a new home. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/3096891522/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Repatriation of Burundian Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

Following the Burundi peace accord of 2005, Burundi and Rwanda agreed to consider asylum seekers from both countries as illegal immigrants and deport them to their respective countries. This was followed by a tripartite agreement signed by UNHCR, Rwanda, and Burundi for the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees in Rwanda. Many Burundian asylum-seekers and refugees were reluctant to return because of ongoing instability and fear of continuing conflict and violence.

Tanzania has increasingly limited the Burundian refugees' rights to freedom of movement, employment, and property ownership, making it necessary for them to seek resettlement elsewhere.

By May of 2009, UNHCR had repatriated nearly 400,000 Burundian refugees, from Rwanda, Tanzania, and other areas. UNHCR launched efforts to reunite separated children with their parents and family in Burundi from neighbouring countries in 2010–2012.

In 2012, UNHCR reported that it planned to assist the voluntary repatriation of about 20,000 Burundians from other countries in the region.

References

- Rwanda, Burundi Refugee Deportation Causes Uproar. <www.refugee-rights.org/Newsletters/GreatLakes/V2N2RwandaBurundiDeportationUproar.htm>.
- Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Burundian Refugees in Rwanda. <www.refworld.org/docid/44ae612dc6.html>.
- 2012 UNHCR country operations profile—Burundi. <www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45c056.html>.

The school week was from Monday to Friday. In Rwanda, there are two school breaks. School would start in February and go to April and then there would be a break for three months then school would reopen in August and go until January. The language used in the school was Kinyarwanda and a little bit of English. The English I learned and spoke in the camp school was different from the English that I learned in Canada.

I really liked going to school. My favourite subject was math and even now I still love math, although I find it hard at times. My biggest difficulty then was learning English. Before I came to Canada I wanted to become a nurse and that is still my hope.



© A. Kirchhof/UNHCR. Photo ID 4128035726. May 18, 2009. The People We Help—Returnees. UNHCR has managed numerous large-scale voluntary repatriation programs that brought millions of refugees home, including these Burundian refugees seen at the border on their return home from Rwanda. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/4128035726/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Immigration to Canada

We were all still living in Rwanda when we immigrated to Canada. I didn't know anything about Canada. All I knew was that living outside of the refugee camp life could be very difficult and dangerous. Because we stayed in the refugee camp, we eventually had the opportunity to immigrate to another country. Our family's resettlement in Canada was based on health reasons.

When I got sick, I went to the camp clinic. The camp had a doctor and a nurse who looked after 2,000 people. I was given medication for the stomach problems I had developed, but I got sicker. The camp hospital transferred me to the local town hospital. In the end, I was sent to three different hospitals. My heart was growing larger and there wasn't any equipment for them to do the surgery.



© Sam Garcia/Embassy. June 4, 2014. Burundian drummers entertain the crowd at Africa Day on May 27 in Ottawa. <www.embassynews.ca/chatter-house/2014/06/04/burundi-drummers--the-perfect-way-to-shush-a-crowd/45615>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

They wanted to give me other medication for my stomach to reduce the gas I was experiencing. My stomach already had an infection. I was really sick; I was throwing up blood. I was in a coma for three months. I spent almost two years in the hospital. I also developed problems with my liver. The hospital could not help me with my heart problems, but they were able to help alleviate my liver and stomach problems.

My move to Canada is a direct result of my health problems. We were allowed to immigrate to Canada so that I could get the medical treatment that I desperately needed. I was really happy to come to Canada because getting healthy was the key to my future. Once I was better and stronger, then I could go back to school, work hard, and eventually become a nurse.

But before coming to Canada, we had to return to Burundi one more time. The Rwandan government began to force Burundians in Rwanda to return home and they destroyed the camp near Kigali. Sadly, we had to leave my uncle (my mother's brother) and his wife and their three children behind.

Starting a New Life in Canada

I was 15 when I moved to Canada. A settlement counsellor from Welcome Place helped us when we arrived. The counsellor met us at the airport.

It was December and it was so cold that I thought that I was going to die from the cold. I couldn't touch anything because I felt frozen. It was very difficult for me to breathe. When I was in the hospital in Rwanda I was on oxygen most of the time, so the cold weather in Winnipeg made me

feel very weak. I could only go outside for very brief periods of time. This is what I remember most about that time. Despite this obstacle, I pushed myself to attend school because I wanted to go to school so badly.



© United Way. September 12, 2012. Drummers from MSIP's Peaceful Village program at Gordon Bell High School. After school programming is an important element in providing equitable and successful educational supports for war-affected learners. <<http://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/tag/peaceful-village/>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

We had some difficulties finding a safe place to live in Winnipeg. Our first home was a house on Toronto Street. Soon after arriving, my medical treatment began. I was recuperating from stomach surgery at home when our house was attacked and three windows were broken in our house: living room, kitchen, and my bedroom window. Luckily, I had sensed that my window would be hit and I pushed a piece of furniture against the window because my bed was directly under it. I am so glad I did because I might have been cut by flying glass. I was so frightened by the attack that I had to return to the hospital. This event forced us to look for another house.

My father put a deposit down on another house we wanted to rent but then we weren't allowed to move in. We tried to get the deposit back but the person had already spent it. Fortunately, an acquaintance gave us two rooms to live in for several months. Later on we found a house to rent on Anderson. But, there were lots of problems with this house too. We lived there for about a year. We moved two more times again before we settled in East Kildonan. In all, we ended up moving five times in the first two years.



Marceline Ndayumvire was the recipient of the Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award in December 2005 for her work to improve women's rights. Marceline Ndayumvire is a survivor of the conflicts in Burundi. Her family was among those first targeted in isolated attacks that began in December 1969. By July 1972, as many as 200-500,000 Hutus were massacred in the Burundi genocide, including Ndayumvire's six siblings and her parents. Marceline has drawn on her experience as a refugee and newcomer in her work with Welcome Place and she has helped many refugees settle and reclaim their lives in Manitoba. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Saskatchewan.

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When I think about those years, those were the things that I liked least about Canada: the break-ins, the many moves, having to go back to the hospital, and being cheated out of \$2,000. But not all was bad. I really liked the fact that living in Canada has allowed me to get an education and the medical treatment that I needed for my heart and stomach problems.

Also, I like the living conditions and physical environment in Canada. Now that I have had heart and stomach surgery and recovered, I am feeling much better. I am thrilled that I now have good health. I never imagined I could feel so well and healthy. I am now able to walk a good distance without tiring. I am strong enough to attend school regularly. I am able to do whatever I want because I am healthy and feel good.

I am also pleased with my life and relationships. When we arrived in Canada there was a family that my family knew from the camp and we were able to resume our friendship. I easily made friends with young people who speak the same languages as I do. I am still living with my family, which has grown since being in Canada, with the birth of my new brother. I have good relationships with all the members of my family. Everyone in my family is active and either working or going to school except for my now three-year-old brother! No one is experiencing any after-effects from the war or from our refugee experiences. We all found it difficult to learn English. But for all of us, the worst problem we faced living in Winnipeg was finding safe, affordable housing. Now that we have found that in East Kildonan, we are all very pleased.



Louise Simbandumwe was the recipient of the 2012 Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award. Louise arrived in Canada at the age of 11 with her family in 1979 as a privately sponsored refugee from Burundi. They became refugees when her parents, who were studying in India at the time, received word of widespread massacres in Burundi that claimed the lives of many of their relatives. These life experiences have made her a passionate advocate for human rights and social justice. Her volunteer commitments include Amnesty International, the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation, the Stop Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls Action Group, the Families at Risk Refugee Sponsorship Committee, the All Aboard Poverty Reduction Committee, and the Immigration Matters in Canada Coalition. She has a Bachelors in Commerce and a Masters in Comparative Social Research. Louise is currently the Director of Asset Building Programs at SEED Winnipeg.

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School Experiences

The first school I attended in Winnipeg was a large junior/senior high school. I went to that school because of a friend of my father. The friend's son went there and he encouraged my father to enrol me at the same school. The EAL classroom I was placed in had about 18 students (depending on the time of day) with one teacher and an educational assistant. I was placed in Grade 7/8. This is the only school I have attended in Canada.

At first, I spent most of my day in the EAL classroom. I was quiet in class but I worked hard and I handed my work in on time. The teachers saw that I was a good student and worked hard. My EAL teacher was very welcoming, spending one-on-one time with me, helping me develop my English skills, and feel more comfortable speaking English. She also made sure that I got other support, such as a volunteer to assist me with my reading when the EAL teacher was working with the other students. The regular (subject) teachers helped me during the lunch break by giving me their time and helping me with what I didn't understand. I was also given extra time on tests and exams. I believe that being placed in the EAL program was good for me.

My friendships and relationships with other students in the school were good. Usually, I found it easy to make friends, but I was shy about talking to the boys in the class even though the classes I attended in Rwanda were mixed. There was another girl who also spoke Swahili and I soon became friends with her. I found having a common language helpful in making friends even though we come from different countries. I also made some Canadian

friends with students in the regular classes who were taking the same subjects. We became friends by working together and helping each other with the assignments and course work. My friendship with these students goes beyond the school and I see them outside of class. I love being in school in Canada, that was my dream.

I do not work while I am in school, so that I can focus on school. I am looking forward to graduating in June 2013.

Life Today and Hopes for the Future

I have just finished volunteering at The Children's Museum. My EAL teacher helped my friend and I become volunteers at the museum. Because of this volunteer work, there is a possibility that I will be able to get a summer job at the museum. I love volunteering at the museum because I love working with children.

Next school year, I will be taking Grade 12 Math, Chemistry, Biology, and Dance. I have already completed my Grade 12 English language arts requirements. I have had good experiences at the school. I had the opportunity to develop a good educational foundation and I am being well-prepared for my future. The school has helped me in identifying what I would like to do and career choices. I have received help from student services in making my course selections and how to apply for scholarships. The school has done all the right things for me. They have been great, and there isn't anything the school should have

done differently. I hope that they continue to offer the same programs and supports to me and other students.

I plan to attend university to study pediatric nursing. I already know how to find a vein and insert an intravenous line because of my illness and the long time I spent in hospitals. I remember when I was in the hospital in Rwanda the doctors suggested that I become a nurse.

I am at a point where I am very satisfied with my life in Canada. I am in good health now and I am living my dream of getting a good education. I feel good about myself and my prospects for the future. I am so very happy to share my story.

VIDEO RESOURCES

See [Caution Concerning the Use of Resources about War and Refugee Experiences](#).

Burundian and Rwandan Conflicts

The 1972 Burundians is a United Nations video by UNFugee about the 1972 Burundi conflict. It appears on the UN's YouTube channel.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BluizW35gFw

Burundi Refugee Displacement is a video about a Burundian refugee's experiences with displacement during several periods of conflict.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=chFUjUVp3zU

The Rwandan Genocide is a series of videos on the History Channel's website about the Rwandan genocide and the international reaction to it.

www.history.com/topics/rwandan-genocide

Rwandan Stories is a great collection of videos, photographs, and articles exploring the origins, details, and aftermath of the Rwandan genocide through the eyes of both survivors and perpetrators.

www.rwandanstories.org/index.html

The Rwandan Refugee Crisis: Before the Genocide: Part I is one of the video resources available from this site which is dedicated to the Rwandan genocide.

www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/rwanda/turning-points/the-rwandan-refugee-crisis-part-i

Refugee Camps and Experiences

UNHCR Tanzania, Angaara Refugee Camp is a 2012 video that provides insights about a camp in Tanzania where about 60,000 Burundians are living.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=omEVKdF9YBo

Burundian refugees in Tanzania worried about the army, by BBC Africa, discusses the fears of Burundians at the last camp left in Tanzania.

www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19080877

NYTimes.com—Signs of Peace in Burundi is a 2008 video about the restrictions placed on Burundians in Tanzania.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKILWPSC2mA

Tanzania: A New Start. The Story of Mawazo Pardon, a Refugee from Burundi is a video by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Mawazo Pardon has a new lease on life. After spending his entire life as a refugee in Tanzania, he now has the possibility to become a citizen of Tanzania.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc_Fsie6j8M

Burundi: Finding Our Place is a 2008 video by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about the challenges faced by returning refugees.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijTiNm5WWPE

UNICEF: Helping returning refugee children in Burundi is a UNICEF video about support being provided to refugee children.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNZP33N4nvw

Burundi 2012 documents the travels of nine youth and three adults in Burundi, working with Sister Connection, an organization that works specifically with widows and orphans.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=giG9KmvubGg

Burundians in the Diaspora

Refugee Stories: Mudibu, Burundi (Parts 1 and 2), by USA for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is the story of Jean Patrick Bimenyimana, whose artistic name is "Mudibu," who grew up in the central African state of Burundi and was forced to flee after the 1993 civil war.

Part 1:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcPwM86fSxI

Part 2:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQt0BFWjcCY

Saido Berahino shares his own refugee story, by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is a video about Burundian refugee and West Bromwich striker, Saido Berahino, who shares his story of displacement, and how he came to find a new, safe home in the UK.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFRGPO8g8zl

No More Blood in Our Phones (Parts 1–4), is a video by Anna De Leon MacDonald, a grade twelve student at the Seven Oaks Met School. Anna was inspired to do this documentary after learning about the negative impact Canadian mining companies are having in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<http://vimeo.com/user12280931>