

USCRI EXPLAINER:

DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN BURUNDI

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Burundi is a small country in East Africa bordered by Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The nation has a rich cultural heritage and complex history, but in recent years, Burundi has faced serious displacement and humanitarian crises, both internally and cross-border.

Driven by climate shocks, economic hardship, and both political and regional instability, these crises require urgent support. USCRI recommends a coordinated response to Burundi's displacement crisis that urgently increases humanitarian funding, strengthens protection services for vulnerable populations (especially children), improves shelter and infrastructure, supports climate resilience and long-term solutions, and enhances regional and international collaboration.

DISPLACEMENT

In total, Burundi hosts over 110,000 refugees and asylum seekers in addition to its over 92,000 internally displaced people (IDPs). In the broader East Africa region, an estimated 255,188 refugees from Burundi reside in neighboring countries.

Burundi has received a massive influx of refugees from the DRC since the start of 2025. Due to escalating violence and insecurity in eastern DRC, particularly in South Kivu and North Kivu, thousands of Congolese have crossed into Burundi seeking refuge. By March 2025, the number of refugees crossing the border between DRC and Burundi was reported to be “the largest influx the country [had] experienced in decades.” **Since January 2025, over 70,000 people have arrived in Burundi from the DRC.** New arrivals included children, and many who were unaccompanied or separated from their families. In June, Save the Children reported that more than 500 children had arrived in Burundi in 2025 separated from their families, with 300 unaccompanied children requiring family reunification services. As of September 2025, over 35,800 refugees were in Burundi due to conflict in the DRC—53 percent of them were children.

The sudden influx from DRC has placed additional pressure on Burundi's already limited resources and fragile infrastructure, especially in regions struggling with internal displacement. Humanitarian agencies and other relevant actors continue to work to provide protection, shelter, and basic services to both refugees and displaced Burundian communities. Despite this, funding and capacity remain significant challenges.

In March 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that aid efforts in Burundi were “buckling” under the rapid rate of arrivals. Although Burundian authorities established reception and transit centers to register and provide emergency assistance to new arrivals, these centers were often overcrowded, open-air, dangerously close to the borders, and without adequate sanitation facilities and other infrastructure. On March 7, Faith Kasina, UNHCR Regional Spokesperson for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes, described conditions at a stadium in Rugombo—where at least 45,000 refugees were sheltering— as “extremely harsh” and that the stadium was “literally bursting at the seams.”

The situation for refugees in Burundi is closely linked to internal displacement, as both stem from overlapping factors like political instability, conflict, and climate-related disasters, which strain resources and heighten the vulnerability of returnees, refugees, and internally displaced populations. Unlike previous periods where conflict was the main driver of displacement in Burundi, today’s IDPs are largely survivors of climate-related shocks, often living in precarious conditions without durable shelter, clean water, or adequate health services. Many families have been left in protracted displacement, highly vulnerable to future disasters and poverty.

Of the 92,000 Burundians who were internally displaced at the end of July 2025, **7,000 were conflict induced IDPs, and 85,000 were displaced by natural disasters**. Floods, landslides, and prolonged droughts have become a leading cause of internal displacement in Burundi. Heavy rains, during the country’s two annual rainy seasons (February to May and September to November) frequently damage homes, destroy farmland, and disrupt livelihoods, forcing thousands of families to flee to temporary shelters or overcrowded host communities. These climate-related events have become more frequent and intense, making displacement a persistent and escalating threat for already vulnerable populations.

Increased displacement in Burundi underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive humanitarian response that addresses not only immediate relief but also long-term resilience and protection for affected communities.

KEY HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

Over 600,000 people need humanitarian aid in Burundi, and 1.23 million people are food insecure. The healthcare system remains fragile and underfunded, making it difficult to respond to **recurring disease outbreaks like cholera, malaria, measles, and Mpox**, all of which spread rapidly among displaced communities.

In April 2025 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders launched interventions for severe malaria treatment and transmission prevention in Burundi’s Musenyi refugee site. MSF detailed that the only health facility at Musenyi was overwhelmed and the lack of medicine was “critical.” The agency found that, between February and April 2025, around 30 percent of children under five who were transferred from Musenyi to surrounding health facilities did not survive, linked to a lack of available ambulances for medical emergencies. By May 2025, Musenyi hosted over double its intended capacity, creating major health risks that aid actors struggled to address.

Burundi is also impacted by the expansive [hunger crisis](#) in the East Africa region, where [8.7 million children](#) under the age of five are acutely malnourished. Displaced communities in Burundi often lack reliable access to sufficient and nutritious food and depend on limited humanitarian food aid. Floods and other natural disasters further disrupt food production, deepening both the displacement and hunger crises.

Despite growing displacement rates, funding for emergency response has been cut. As of September 30, 2025, UNHCR's [financial requirements in Burundi for 2025](#) were only 32 percent funded. Due to funding constraints, many displaced communities have been left without necessities and protection services critical for survival. In March 2025, UNHCR [established](#) a protection desk "to provide critical psychosocial support and to assist in identifying specific needs among new arrivals, including unaccompanied children, survivors of sexual violence, the elderly, and people with serious medical conditions." However, lack of resources left people without follow-up care. In June 2025, Save the Children [warned](#) that **the number of children reporting sexual assault after fleeing into Burundi from the DRC had more than tripled**, with aid cuts drastically reducing available support. Over 172 cases of gender-based violence against refugee children were [recorded](#) by the agency's staff in Burundi between January and June 2025 alone. Most were rape cases. Yet humanitarian agencies remain unable to help the thousands of children in reception centers and refugee sites due to funding cuts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The displacement and humanitarian crises in Burundi—driven by conflict, climate shocks, and regional instability—have reached a critical point. The influx of refugees from the DRC, combined with ongoing internal displacement largely due to natural disasters, has overwhelmed Burundi's limited infrastructure and strained humanitarian operations. Displaced groups, especially children, face heightened risks including malnutrition, disease, and gender-based violence, while aid agencies struggle to respond amid severe funding shortages.

To address the urgent needs and protect displaced populations, USCRI recommends the following:

- **Increase humanitarian funding.** Donors must urgently scale up [financial support](#) to meet basic needs, including food, shelter, healthcare, and protection services, especially for children and survivors of gender-based violence.
- **Strengthen protection services.** Expand access to psychosocial support, case management, and family reunification services for unaccompanied and separated children. Protection desks and child-friendly spaces must be adequately staffed and resourced.
- **Improve shelter and infrastructure.** Invest in safe, weather-resilient reception and transit centers with adequate sanitation and capacity to prevent overcrowding and disease spread.

- **Support climate resilience and durable solutions.** Promote long-term strategies that reduce vulnerability to climate-related displacement through livelihood support, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development programs.
- **Enhance regional and international coordination.** Strengthen collaboration between Burundian authorities, neighboring countries, and humanitarian actors to ensure a coordinated, timely response to cross-border and internal displacement.

For more on the East Africa region:

- [Rising Starvation, Fading Attention: The Hunger Crisis in East Africa](#)
- [How Humanitarian Funding Impacts Refugees](#)
- [Towards a #PeriodFriendlyWorld: Menstrual Hygiene in Displacement Settings in East Africa](#)
- [When Home is Gone: Unaccompanied & Separated Children in East Africa](#)

For more information, please contact policy@refugees.org