United Nations University

# The Impact of Refugee Return on Land Access and Food Security

Sonja Fransen, Craig Loschmann & Carlos Vargas-Silva, Paris 2018

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- Return migration/repatriation as an optimum solution to refugee crises?
  - Large-scale refugee repatriation is often considered a threat to peace, especially when return flows are large and sudden
  - Rapid population increases resulting from return flows may lead to increased competition over resources and more scarcity

- Aim of this paper: study the effects of refugee return on land access and food security for stayee households (i.e. those who never left the country of origin).

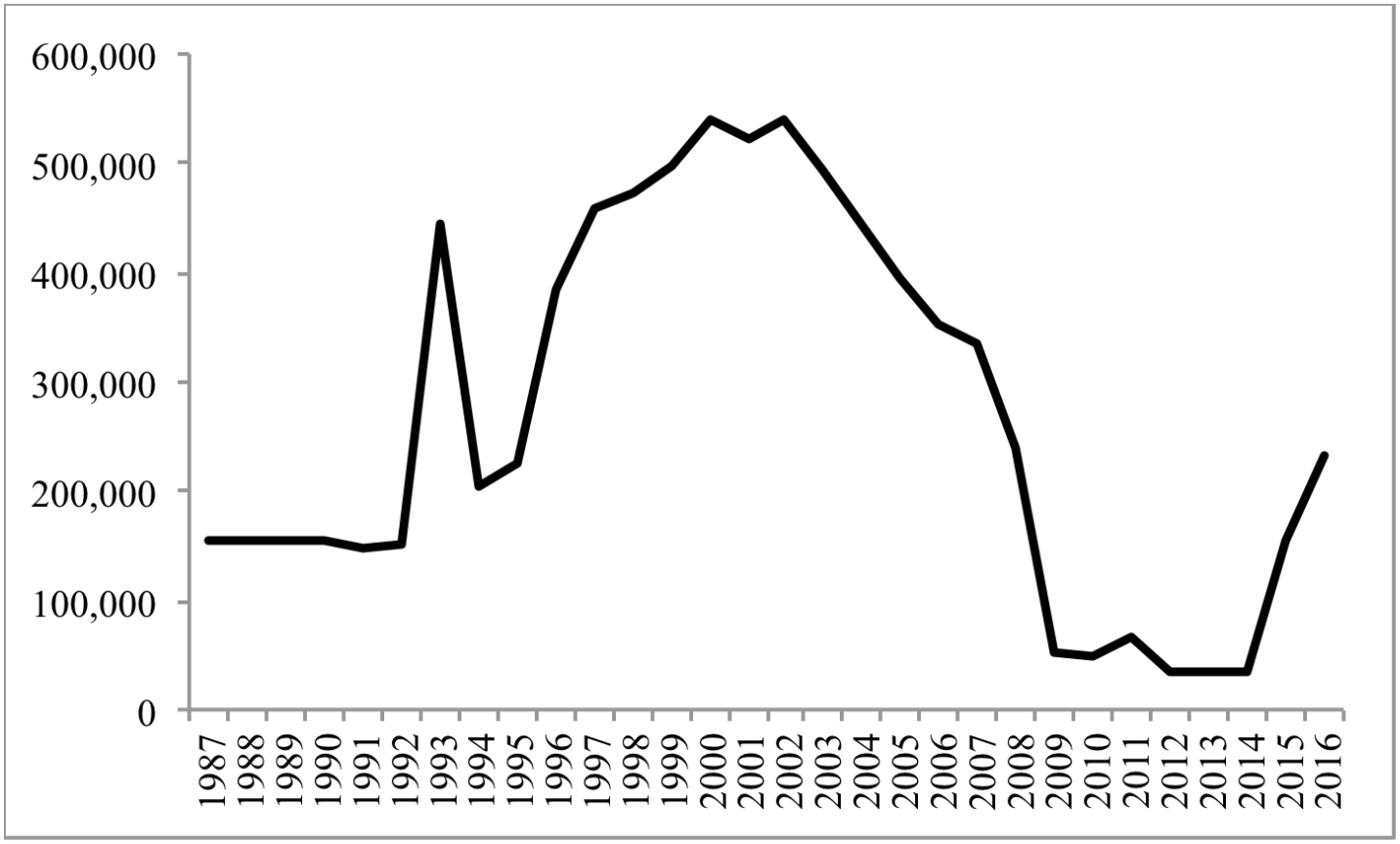
# The case study Burundi


Map No. 3753 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
November 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Source: UNHCR, 1993

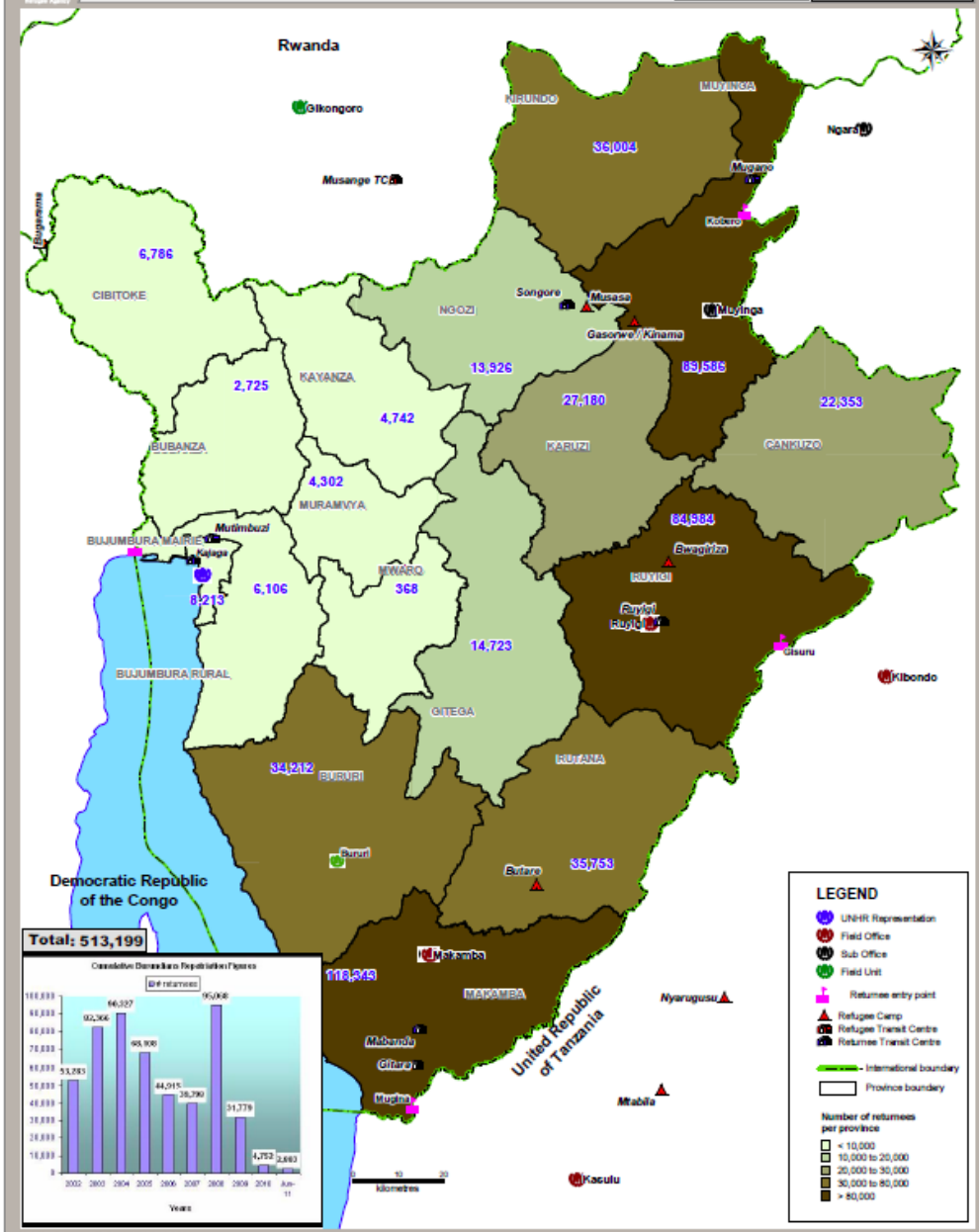
Figure 2. Number of Burundian refugees in Tanzania




Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017).

# UNHCR BURUNDI
# NUMBER OF RETURNEES PER PROVINCE
# 01 March 2002 - 30 June 2011

As of June 2011



# Data

- Nationally representative household and community panel data – 2011 & 2015
- 1,500 households, 7,986 household members, in 100 communities
  - 965 households in both rounds

(funder: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IZA & DFiD)

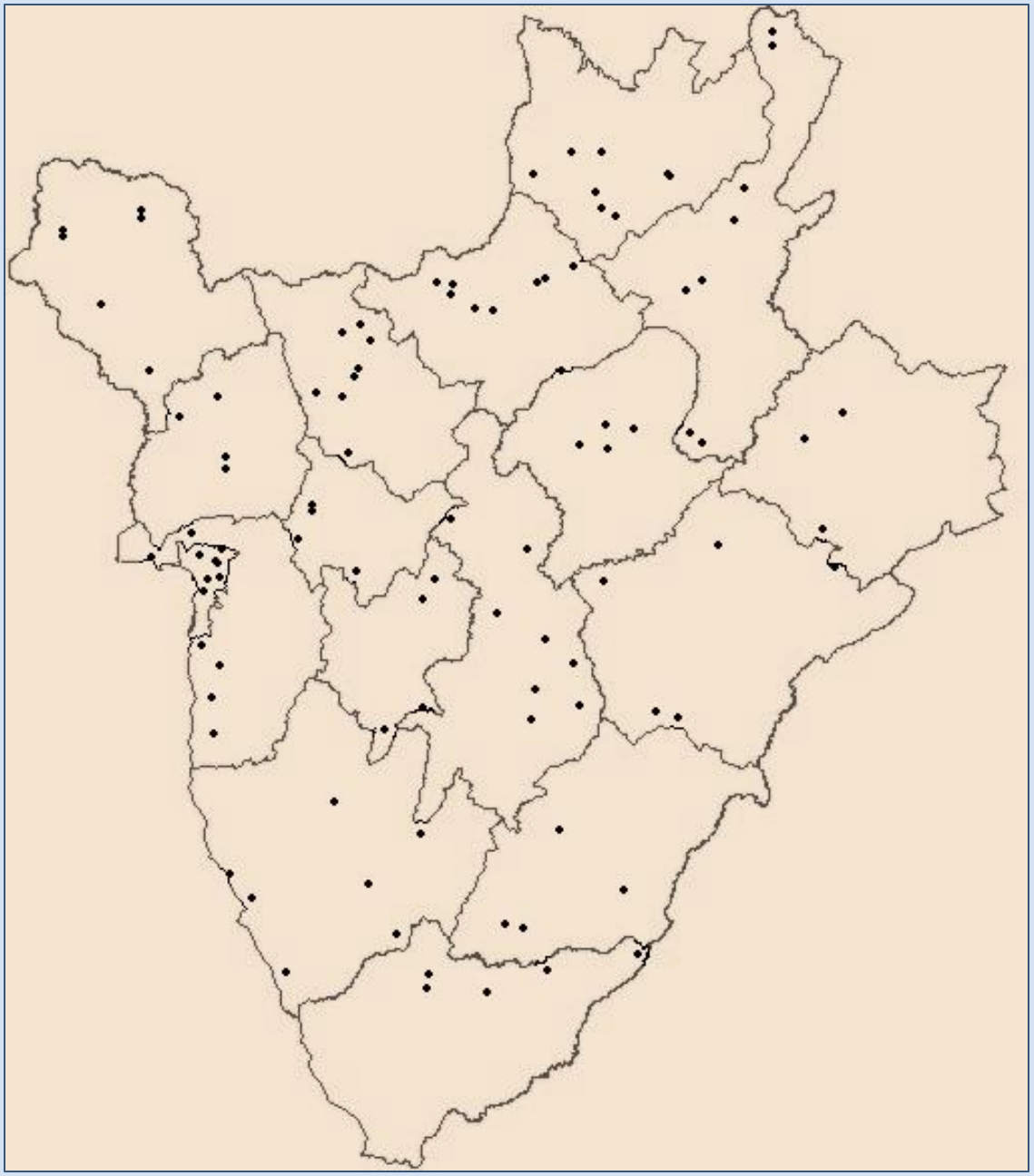


Table II: Summary statistics of outcomes

| | 2011 | | 2015 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | Mead | SD |
| Land ownership | 0.87 | 0.33 | 0.94 | 0.23 |
| Hectares of land (ihs) | 0.80 | 0.59 | 0.97 | 0.68 |
| Tropical livestock unit (ihs) | 0.35 | 0.56 | 0.57 | 0.65 |
| Total food spending (BIF) | 14206.26 | 3340.55 | 10627.91 | 2341.46 |
| Share of food spending | 0.54 | 0.20 | 0.47 | 0.18 |
| Food difficulties (daily) | 0.39 | 0.49 | 0.11 | 0.32 |
| Observations | 596 | | 596 | |

An inverse hyperbolic sine transformation is indicated by 'ihs', while total food spending is reported in Burundian Franc (BIF).

Table IV: Mean difference of outcomes, by share of returnees in a community

| | 2011 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Low return community | High return community | Mean difference |
| Land ownership | 0.91 | 0.82 | 0.09*** |
| Hectares of land (ihs) | 0.85 | 0.74 | 0.11** |
| Tropical livestock unit (ihs) | 0.38 | 0.31 | 0.07 |
| Total food spending (BIF) | 14328.77 | 14030.75 | 298.03 |
| Share of food spending | 0.54 | 0.55 | -0.01 |
| Food difficulties (daily) | 0.40 | 0.38 | 0.01 |
| Observations | 351 | 245 | 596 |
| | 2015 | | |
| | Low return community | High return community | Mean difference |
| Land ownership | 0.94 | 0.95 | -0.01 |
| Hectares of land (ihs) | 0.99 | 0.94 | 0.05 |
| Tropical livestock unit (ihs) | 0.61 | 0.50 | 0.12** |
| Total food spending (BIF) | 10777.83 | 10389.33 | 388.51** |
| Share of food spending | 0.46 | 0.49 | -0.03* |
| Food difficulties (daily) | 0.11 | 0.13 | -0.02 |
| Observations | 366 | 230 | 596 |

* p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. The low vs. high return community cut-off is based on the median share of returnees in all communities. An inverse hyperbolic sine transformation is indicated by 'ihs', while total food spending is reported in Burundian Franc (BIF).

Table V. Land ownership, hectares of land owned, and tropical livestock unit (TLU)

| | Land ownership | Land ownership | Hectares (ihs) | Hectares (ihs) | TLU (ihs) | TLU (ihs) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share of returnee households | -0.48** | -0.46* | -1.25** | -1.31** | -1.52*** | -1.11*** |
| | (0.20) | (0.23) | (0.49) | (0.49) | (0.34) | (0.30) |
| Share*Year | 0.36*** | 0.32*** | 0.72*** | 0.72*** | 0.78*** | 0.59*** |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.23) | (0.25) | (0.17) | (0.17) |
| Controls | | X | | X | | X |
| Observations | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 |

* p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. Fixed effect estimates with robust standard errors clustered at the commune level in parentheses. Household and year fixed effects included in all models. 'Tropical Livestock Unit (TLU)' is a measure of livestock ownership, and 'ihs' indicates inverse hyperbolic sine transformation.

Table VI. Total food spending, share of food spending and daily food difficulties

| | Total food spending | Total food spending | Share food spending | Share food spending | Food difficulties | Food difficulties |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share of returnee households | 18727.43*** | 15177.82*** | 0.54*** | 0.46*** | 1.58*** | 1.29** |
| | (3009.37) | (3068.08) | (0.11) | (0.12) | (0.57) | (0.59) |
| Share*Year | -13331.96*** | -11137.43*** | -0.29*** | -0.24*** | -0.95*** | -0.78*** |
| | (1199.51) | (1343.43) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.23) | (0.27) |
| Controls | | X | | X | | X |
| Observations | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 | 1,192 |

* p<0.10 ** p<0.05 *** p<0.01. Fixed effect estimates with robust standard errors clustered at the commune level in parentheses. Household and year fixed effects included in all models. Total food spending is measured in Burundian Franc.

# Discussion of findings

- stayee households in communities with a higher share of returnees have on average lower levels of land access and food security
  - a greater share of returnees in a community is associated with less land ownership, smaller plot sizes of land owned and less livestock ownership.
  - more return migration is associated with higher absolute and relative spending on food for stayee households, as well as difficulties in meeting daily food needs.

- negative impact of refugee return dissipates over time

- Potential channels for these results: Communities with higher levels of return also experienced an increase in non-farm self-employment over time.

# Conclusion

- Large-scale refugee return is likely to lead to hardship in contexts in which there are scarce natural resources and in which returnees bring little or no capital.
- Refugee return can lead to hardship for communities experiencing return.
- However, even in this very adverse context the negative consequences of return migration for stayee households largely disappear after five years.
- Importance of longitudinal data

# Thank you

s.fransen@uva.nl
www.econforced.com

**Further reading:**

Fransen, S. Vargas-Silva, C., & Ruiz, I (2017). Return migration and economic outcomes in the conflict context. *World Development.*

Fransen, S. & Siegel, M. (2017). *The multi-dimensional reintegration of first- and second-generation returned children.* In M. Ensor and E. Gozdziak, Children and Forced Migration: Durable Solutions during Transient Years. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fransen, S. (2015). The socio-economic sustainability of refugee return: Insights from Burundi. *Population, Space and Place,* 2015