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*Humanity Starts Here*

# **The Resettlement of Burundian Refugees to Australia (1993–2020)**

*Welcomed by compassion*

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## Introduction

This document provides an insightful analysis of the resettlement of Burundian refugees in Australia, focusing on those who arrived through the Refugee and Humanitarian Visa Program between 1993 and 2020. It examines the factors contributing to their displacement, the alignment of their resettlement with Australian values, and the impact of the Burundian community on Australian society.

### 1. Context of Flight: Why Burundians Fled

The Burundian refugee cohort in Australia primarily stems from two major waves of political instability in the Great Lakes region. These individuals often spent years, sometimes decades, in displacement camps before resettlement.

#### The Two Major Waves of Displacement

- **The 1993 Civil War:** The assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, Burundi's first democratically elected president, in October 1993 triggered a brutal decade-long ethnic civil war. Approximately 300,000 people were killed, and hundreds of thousands fled into neighbouring countries. Many Burundians arriving in Australia in the early 2000s are survivors of this conflict.
- **The 2015 Political Crisis:** Political instability following President Pierre Nkurunziza's bid for a third term led to violent crackdowns and further displacement. Over 400,000 Burundians fled between 2015 and 2020.

#### The Camp Experience

Most Burundians resettled in Australia did not come directly from Burundi but from protracted refugee situations in neighbouring countries. Key countries of asylum included:

- **Tanzania:** Hosted the largest numbers in camps such as Nyarugusu, Nduta, and Mtendeli.
- **Uganda:** Specifically, Nakivale and Kyaka II settlements.
- **Kenya & Malawi:** Served as transit points for those moving to urban centres (e.g., Nairobi) or camps like Dzaleka.

### 2. Alignment with Australian Values

The resettlement of Burundians was facilitated primarily through Australia's **Refugee and Humanitarian Program**, which aligns closely with national values of compassion and a "fair go".

- **Humanitarian Obligation:** The intake offers safety to those who have no prospect of safe return, reflecting Australia's commitment to protecting the vulnerable.
- **Family Unity (Subclass 202):** A significant number of individuals in the community arrived under the Global Special Humanitarian Visa (Subclass 202). This visa permits established Australian residents to sponsor family members who are still facing refugee circumstances. This policy highlights the Australian value of family unity, acknowledging that successful settlement often depends on the emotional support provided by loved ones.

### 3. Impact on Australia: Benefits and Consequences

The Burundian diaspora has grown significantly, with the Estimated Resident Population reaching approximately 3,450 by 2021. The community has transitioned from new arrivals to active contributors to Australian society.

#### Benefits to Australia

- **Workforce Resilience and Entrepreneurship:** Despite initial language barriers, the community is noted for high resilience and labour market participation. Burundians in Australia own and operate businesses across various sectors, contributing to the economy and creating employment opportunities. Additionally, second-generation Burundian-Australians (educated in Australia) are increasingly entering professional sectors such as law, social work, and engineering.
- **Regional Development:** Many Burundian families have settled in regional and outer-metropolitan areas (e.g., regional Queensland, Logan, and Northern Adelaide). This settlement pattern helps counter population decline in these zones and supports local economies by filling labour shortages in agriculture and essential industries.
- **Civic Engagement:** The formation of community groups, such as the United Burundian Diaspora in Australia (UBDA), demonstrates a commitment to social cohesion. These organisations arrange cultural festivals and events that enrich Australia's multicultural landscape.

#### Consequences and Challenges

- **Complex Trauma:** A high percentage of this cohort survived war or torture. This requires specialised mental health resources to address long-term trauma.
- **Acculturation Stress:** Families often face the challenge of navigating a new culture while maintaining their own traditions. This is particularly difficult for single-parent households or those separated from family members who remain in Africa.

#### Conclusion

The resettlement of Burundian refugees to Australia between 1993 and 2020 represents a successful integration of humanitarian compassion and economic opportunity.

1. **Origins:** The community originated from severe conflict and protracted displacement in East African camps.
2. **Integration:** Through the Humanitarian Visa Program, they have established a stable, resilient community in Australia that aligns with the nation's values of family and support.
3. **Contribution:** Burundian-Australians have revitalised regional communities and entered the workforce with determination.