

## Burundi Country profile

- **Capital:** Bujumbura
- **10.4m** population (similar to Belgium)
- **Ethnic groups:** Hutu (80%), Tutsi (20%), Twa (1%)
- **27,830 km<sup>2</sup>** area
- **50 years** life expectancy for men
- **50 years** life expectancy for women
- **\$900** GDP per capita - similar to Liberia  
UN, World Bank, CIA World Factbook

### Some key dates in Burundi's history

**1890** - The kingdoms of Urundi and neighbouring Ruanda (Rwanda) incorporated into German East Africa.

**1916** - Belgian army occupies the area.

**1962** - Urundi is separated from Ruanda-Urundi and becomes independent.

**1993** - Ethnic conflict between hutu and tutsi claims some 300,000 lives.

**2000** – Signature of the Arusha peace agreement and beginning of Transitional government

**2005** – Pierre Nkurunziza democratically elected as first post-transition President

**2015** - Unrest sparked by president's plans to stand for third term.

### **Overview**

Burundi is a small, landlocked country (27,830 km<sup>2</sup>), one of the five poorest countries in the world. It is the second most densely populated country in Africa with about 470 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, and a population of about 11.2 million in all. With close to 72.9% of its population live below the poverty line, Burundi ranks 184<sup>th</sup> out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index. Its economy is heavily reliant on the agricultural sector, which employs 80% of the population, despite the extreme paucity of arable land. Poverty overwhelmingly affects small rural farmers. Since 2000, Burundi has worked towards revitalizing the economy and forging national unity but rapid population growth and inefficient agricultural production are serious challenges.

### **Socio-economic context**

Burundi ranks last on food insecurity, according to the Global Hunger Index. About 1.76 million people are food insecure, and more than half (6 in 10) of children are stunted (Consumer Price Index, March 2017)—the highest globally. Although agriculture employs around 80% of the population, the sector contributes only about 40% to GDP. There is very limited access to water and sanitation, and less than 5% of the population has electricity (World Bank, 2016). The fertility rate has, however, decreased from 6.4 to 5.5 children per woman on average between 2010 and 2017. Recession continues to afflict Burundi, owing to the fragile political environment as well as low private consumption levels caused by declining food production related to climate shocks, and forced migration (creating refugees and internally displaced persons). Inflation remains moderate at 6%—below the 8% convergence level agreed on by the East Africa Community (EAC). Extremely low foreign currency reserves are significantly restricting imports, including fuel and medicine, even though these are deemed government priorities.

### **Political context**

Burundi's history as an independent country has been characterized by political instability and persistent violence, although the Arusha Peace Agreement, signed by rival political and armed groups in 2000, restored relative stability in Burundi, paving the way for economic recovery. In 2005, Pierre Nkurunziza, a former Hutu rebel leader, became the first democratically-elected president since the civil war of 1994.

The controversial reelection of President Pierre Nkurunziza in 2015, for a third unconstitutional mandate, and a failed coup to overthrow his regime in the same year, triggered a political crisis that has so far caused

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hundreds of victims and a significant number of refugees in neighboring countries. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered almost 275,000 Burundian refugees and asylum seekers in other countries since 2015. In March 2018, UNHCR and Burundi's Ministry of Interior and UNHCR reported a slight trend in reverse, with over 20,000 Burundian refugees who had reportedly returned home since September 2017. The crisis has also been at the origin of serious human rights violations including extra-judicial killings, abductions, enforced disappearance, mainly committed by the youth wing of the ruling party, the Imbonerakure, often acting in complicity with State officials. According to human rights actors, many of the violations targeted members of the opposition, the media and other voices critical of the Government.

2017 and 2018 have seen the Government of Burundi asserting its authority, opting to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC) from October 27, 2017, refusing to renew the MOU with the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) and denying access to the country to UN investigators of the Commission of Inquiry, mandated by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council. The ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has tightened its grip on government, rejecting the UN Resolution that would have authorized the deployment of 228 police officers to monitor the security situation in the country. The authorities set up a committee to review the constitution, that was formally allowed through a referendum held in May 2018. Results of the referendum showed that people voted overwhelmingly for constitutional reforms that could allow President Nkurunziza to stay in office until 2034. The implementation of the Constitutional changes is currently ongoing.

In 2017 and early 2018 Security Council reports of the UN Special Envoy for Burundi, Michel Kafando, were rejected by the Government as they highlighted the need for a more inclusive dialogue in Burundi as well as expressed concern on the human rights situation, by the State and actors affiliated to it, primarily the Imbonerakure militia. In his most recent statement to the UN Security Council in August 2018, the UN Envoy was more positive on the situation in Burundi and particularly commended President Nkurunziza for his recent commitment to leave office in 2020 and for the adoption on 3 August of a roadmap for the 2020 elections. Credible sources indicate that the decision was taken by the President due to increasing dissent and divisions within the ruling party on him staying in power.

During the past three years, accusations by Burundi that Rwanda is hosting and training individuals connected to the 2015 attempted putsch in Burundi, has caused a deterioration of relations between the two countries. Also, a rise in the frequency of cross-border attacks and incursions was observed, notably in the Cibitoke and Kamanyola, areas. Since June 2018, these incursions led to a significant reinforcement of the border zone by the Rwandan security services.

### **EAC-led inter Burundi dialogue**

To resolve the political crisis of 2015 and promote inclusive political dialogue in Burundi, the regional and international community decided that efforts should be led by an East African Community under the facilitation of former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and the Mediation of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. The mechanism however registered little progress and became stagnant in 2017 due to the manifest lack of will of the parties – the Government and mainly the external radical opposition – to make concessions to come to the table of negotiations. However, at an informal meeting convened by the SESG for the Great Lakes region, Said Djinnit in Nairobi on 29 June 2018, the SESG for Burundi, Michel Kafando, and SRSG for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, Francois Fall agreed on some of some key priorities of focus in support the EAC-led dialogue. These included: the impact of the revised Constitution on the implementation of the letter and spirit as well as the legacy of the Arusha agreement; conditions for dialogue and need to agree on criteria for inclusivity, venue and agenda; and need for a clear roadmap to elections in 2020, which includes scenarios and entry points for accompaniment by UN. As of August 2018, preparations were ongoing for the fifth round of talks which was to focus – inter alia - on these priorities.