

Burundi: return to vulnerability



2015

Many fled Burundi during or after the 2015 crisis over fears of abuses against political opponents, more generalised violence sparked by the political crisis, socio-economic vulnerability, or because of a combination of those factors.

2016

2017

In August 2017, UNHCR started repatriating Burundian refugees from Tanzania, as both governments wanted refugees to go back. So far more than 70,000 have already returned. In our research, they mainly cited the dire humanitarian conditions and the encampment policies in Tanzania their reasons for returning.

2018

In August 2019, the governments of Burundi and Tanzania signed an agreement to facilitate return back to Burundi, extending further pressure to return. Initial reports confirm, many are unwilling to return and are crossing into other countries.

2019

October 2019, Tanzania closed down market activities in refugee camps, preparing to forcibly return more than 200,000 refugees. Initial reports confirm many are unwilling to return and are crossing, for instance, into Uganda.

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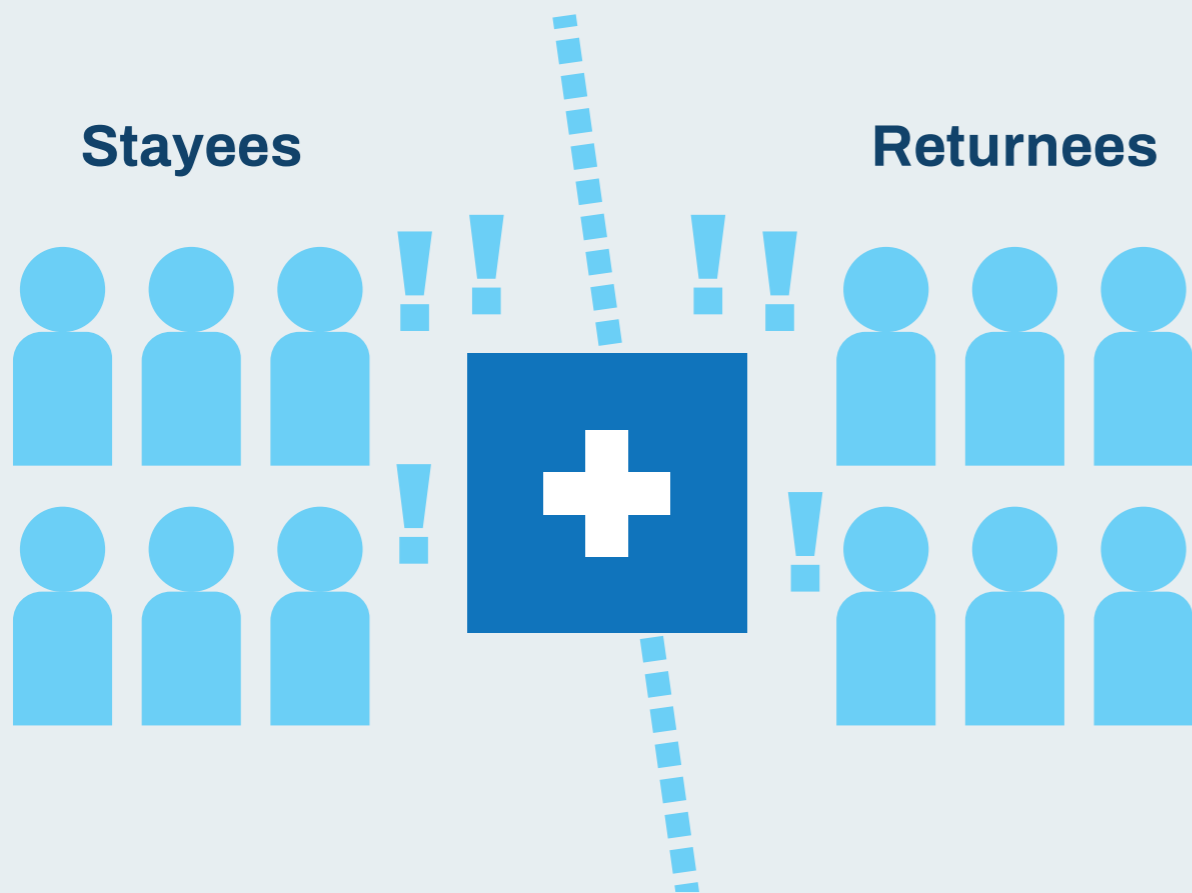


While returnees in Burundi encounter solidarity assistance,



They are also facing mistrust and socio-political exclusion. With no fundamental changes in the economic and political situation between their flight and their return, returnees are particularly vulnerable.

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External assistance is a driver of social tensions in areas of return: returnees complain about corruption and discrimination, those who stayed in Burundi feel sidelined or “punished” for staying.

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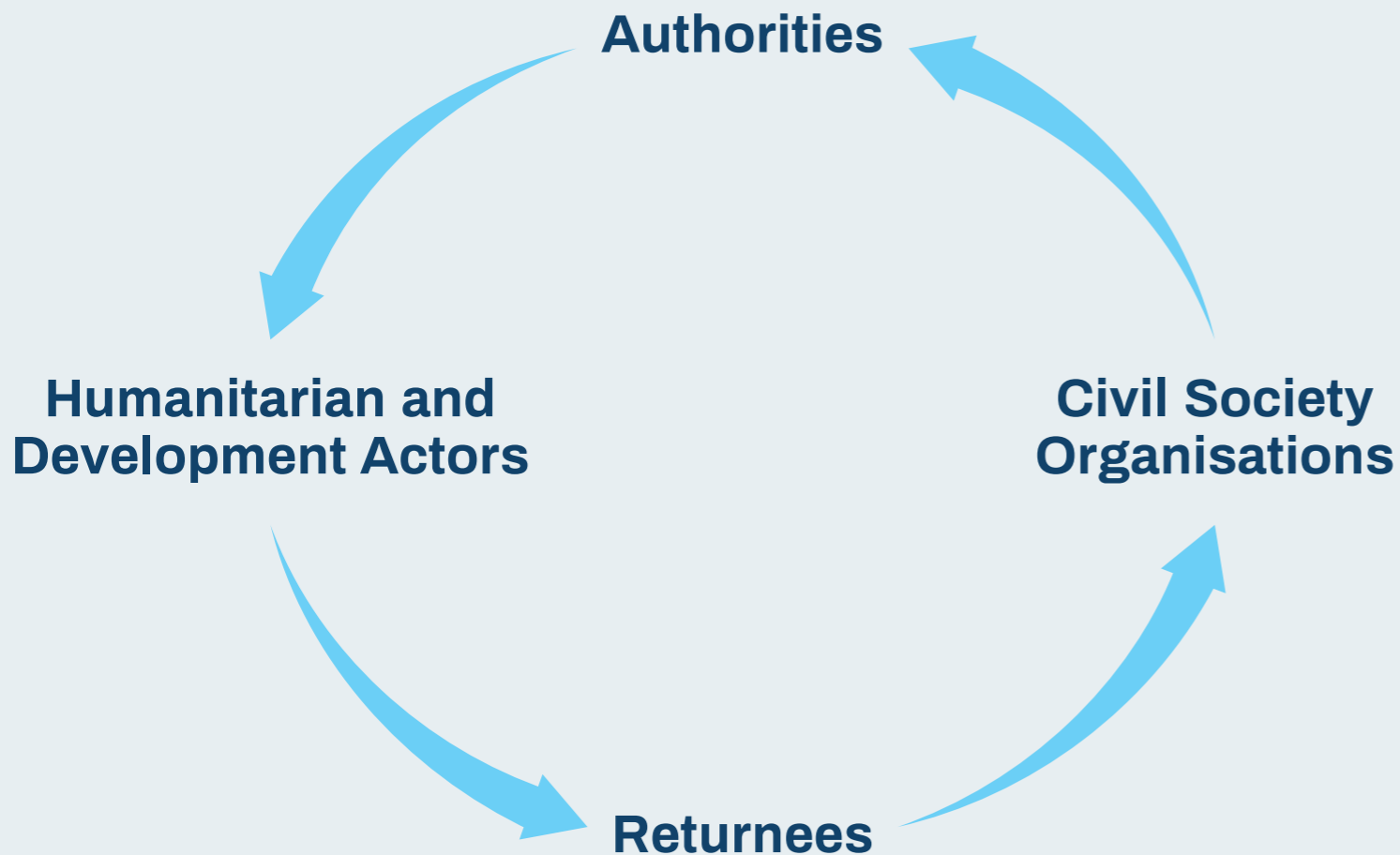


While in the past, land was a serious source of conflict,



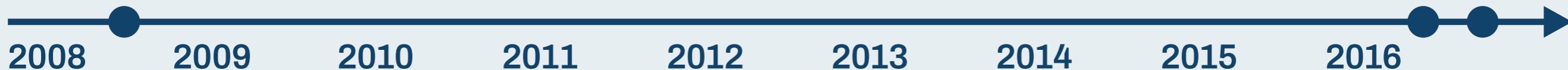
this is less the case for the current return process. However, not everybody settled back in the areas from which they departed.

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There is a need for more coordination and collaboration between actors supporting the return process, such as UNHCR, NGOs and local and national authorities.

Faradje: 'spontaneous returns' and the impacts of humanitarian structures

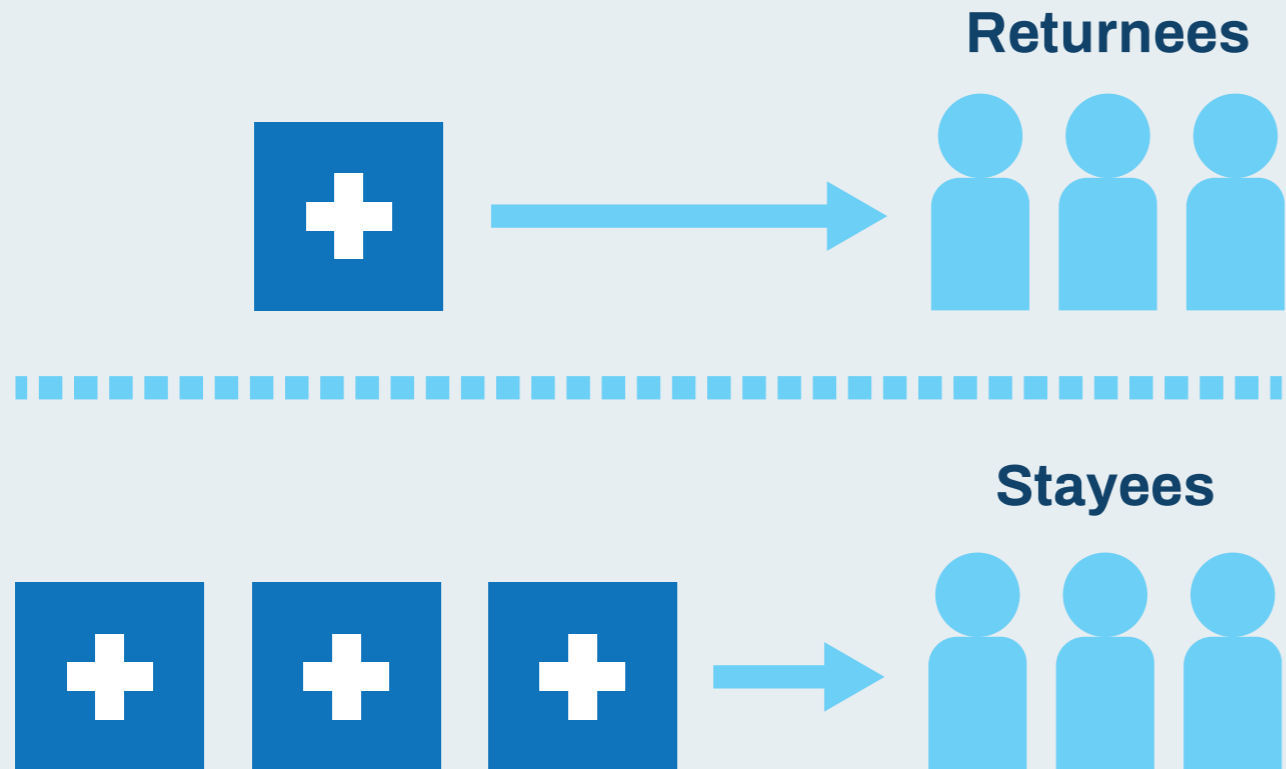


Most of our respondents fled DRC in 2008-2009, because of attacks by the LRA and insufficient protection by the Congolese government.

When fighting broke out between South Sudanese government forces and rebels in 2016, around 11,600 of the 12,000 returned to DRC together with more than 34,000 refugees from South Sudan.

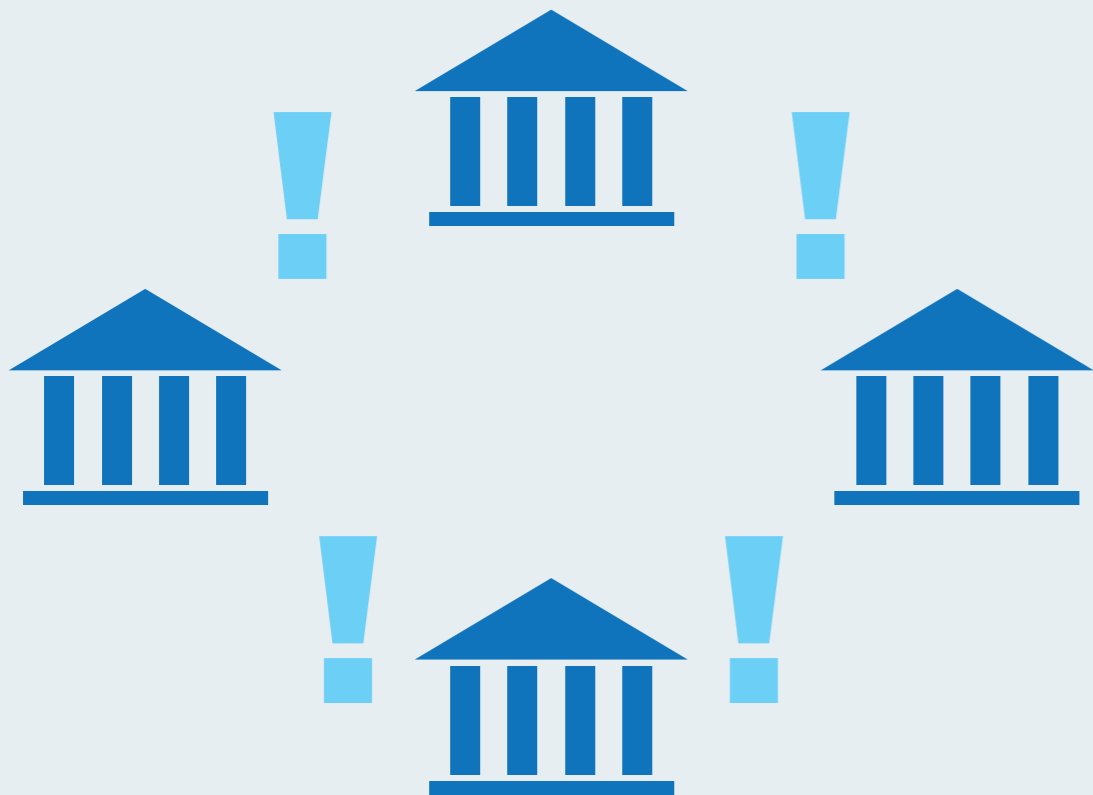
Security challenges, frustrations over external assistance and contestation between established and new forms of authority continue to cause frictions.

Faradje: 'spontaneous returns' and the impacts of humanitarian structures



Returnees are frustrated with the minimal assistance provided to them, compared with what they perceive as more generous assistance provided to South Sudanese refugees.

Faradje: 'spontaneous returns' and the impacts of humanitarian structures



There is friction between traditional authorities and new authorities linked to the return process, including representatives of the returnee community and humanitarian organisations.

Faradje: 'spontaneous returns' and the impacts of humanitarian structures



Overall security challenges in the border area between DRC and South Sudan and the refugee presence impact on the situation of returnees.

Kalehe: displacement, suspicion and militarisation

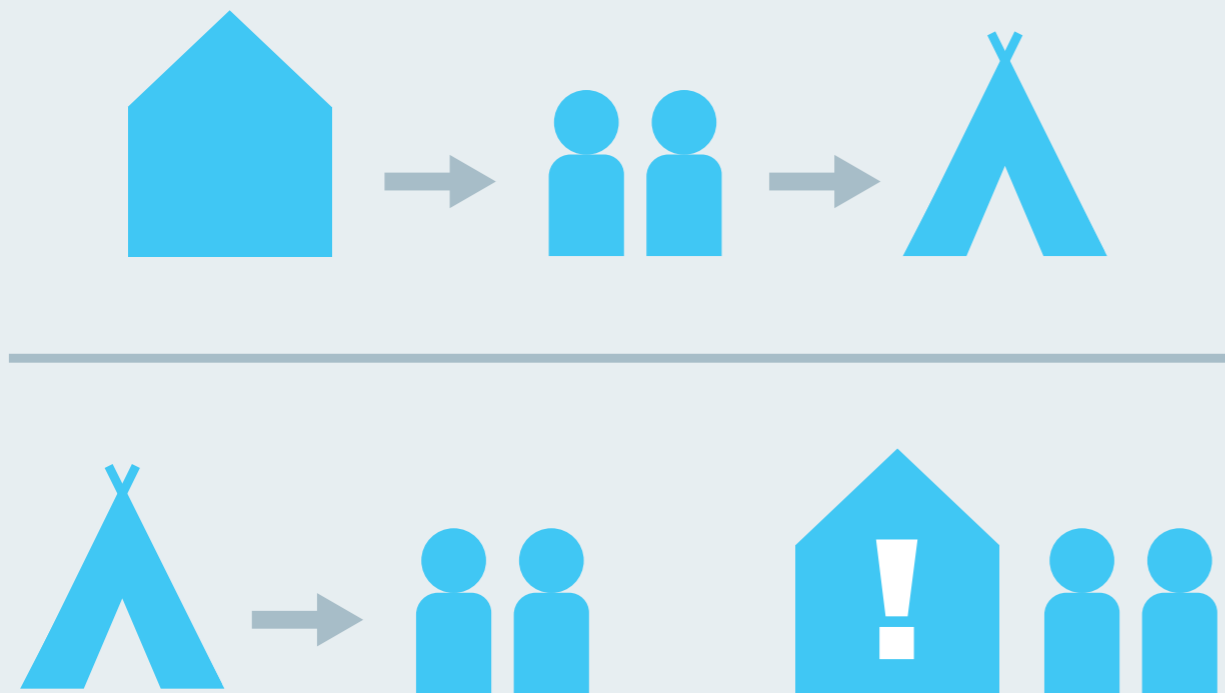


Kalehe: displacement, suspicion and militarisation



A number of people continue to return to use their lands, while not cutting ties with Rwanda. Others have come back on exploratory visits. An anticipated larger scale return of Congolese Tutsi refugees sparks nervousness among different communities.

Kalehe: displacement, suspicion and militarisation



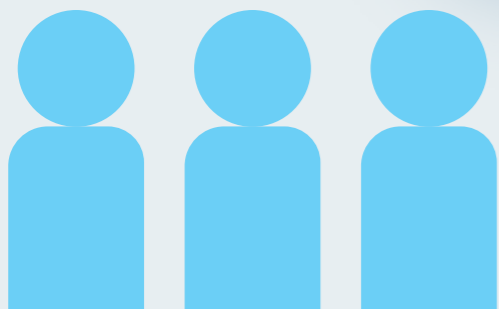
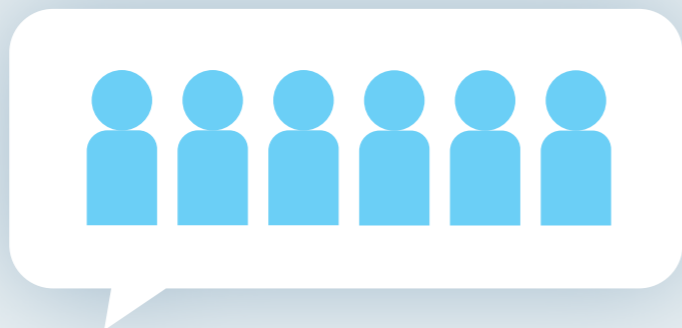
Returnees attempt to reclaim their land, which has often been sold, damaged or occupied, resulting in disputes and tensions with other communities.

Kalehe: displacement, suspicion and militarisation



The citizenship and nationality of returnees from Rwanda is being contested by other communities and by armed groups, impacting on their ability to reclaim land and reintegrate into society.

Kalehe: displacement, suspicion and militarisation



Local authorities and international actors are not able to provide reliable information and have little leverage on return movements and associated conflict dynamics.