

# Refugee return and social cohesion

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**Abstract:** Refugee return often involves the re-encounter of individuals who were separated for years, but we know little about its impact on social cohesion. We explore this impact using data from a nationwide survey that we conducted in Burundi, a country that experienced high levels of repatriation during the 2000s. We find that refugee return has a negative impact on the feeling that community members help each other, could borrow money for emergencies from non-household members, and the feeling that the community is peaceful. The impacts on measures of reconciliation, post-conflict justice, trust, and participation in community groups are mostly statistically insignificant. We also explore how these effects differ across different sub-samples based on ethnic composition, pre-war land scarcity, and attitudes towards return. The results highlight the possible role of new migration-related societal divisions in affecting post-return social cohesion.

**Keywords:** forced migration, repatriation, social cohesion, Burundi

**JEL classification:** D74, F22, Q15

## I. Introduction

The preferred ‘solution’ to their displacement for many refugees worldwide is to return home (UNHCR, 2019). For some this return will occur eventually, even if years or sometimes decades have passed since they left their home communities. However, there is little understanding of the impact of repatriation on social cohesion in communities of return. As suggested in a recent World Bank review on the evidence of social cohesion and forced displacement: ‘issues of return and repatriation are also largely invisible in the literature’ (De Berry and Roberts, 2018). They also add that ‘this absence weakens a programmatic ability to devise inclusive interventions in return areas’. This is a major

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gap in the evidence as social cohesion is crucial to maintaining peace and stability in communities that are recovering from conflict (Langer *et al.*, 2017). In this paper, we explore the impact of repatriation on social cohesion in communities of return.

While there is limited evidence on the impacts of refugee return on social cohesion, there is substantial evidence on the impact of exposure to conflict on social cohesion (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). These studies provide insights on the possible impacts of repatriation on social cohesion in communities of return. The evidence suggests that those more exposed to conflict tend to behave more cooperatively after the end of conflict (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Voors *et al.*, 2012; Gilligan *et al.*, 2014; Hall *et al.*, 2021; Skoog, 2021). Yet, studies suggest that the increase in cooperative behaviour is limited to in-group members and that those more exposed to conflict cooperate less with out-group members (Bauer *et al.*, 2014; Cecchi *et al.*, 2016).

Therefore, an important aspect is whether stayees (i.e. those who did not leave the country during the conflict) and returnees (i.e. those who left and returned) perceive each other in a way that would reduce social cohesion. Divisions that contributed to conflict, such as clan, ethnic, regional, or class lines, can still be present after conflict and can overlap with return patterns if returnees or stayees are concentrated in a particular group. In this case, out-migration of particular groups can reify and reinforce conflict-era cleavages, and then reintroduce those cleavages through the process of refugee return.

The process of large-scale emigration during the conflict and return later on can also lead to the creation of new divisions in society. These divisions can either replace or get mixed with more traditional identity categories (Schwartz, 2019). In this case, out-migration and return can affect social cohesion by creating new divisions (i.e. stayees versus returnees) within previously coherent social groups.

The impact of repatriation is not confined to identity issues only; there could be broader economic concerns. This is particularly the case in communities that have limited natural resources (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2021). The influx of returnees can lead to more competition for those resources (e.g. land) and affect the level of social cohesion in the community.

To explore the impact of refugee return on social cohesion we use data that we collected in Burundi in 2015. This country experienced a conflict during 1993–2005, in which 5 per cent of the population was killed and 10 per cent was displaced internationally (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2015, 2016).<sup>1</sup> The end of protection in neighbouring countries led to the return of over 500,000 refugees in the period of a few years. In the survey we collected information for households in 100 communities across the country, including detailed information on indicators of support across households, violence and reconciliation, trust, and participation in community groups.

In the analysis, we explore the impact of refugee return in general and by community sub-samples, including communities with more/less ethnic diversity, more/less pre-war land scarcity, and more/less negative attitudes towards migrant return. Our results suggest varying impacts of refugee return on different aspects of social cohesion. The stronger effects suggest that refugee return has a negative impact on the feeling that community members help each other, could borrow money for emergencies from non-household members, and the feeling that the community is peaceful. The estimated impacts of refugee return on measures of trust and participation in community groups are mostly statistically insignificant.

<sup>1</sup> While Burundi has experienced another wave of political tensions and displacement since then, our analysis precedes these events.

## II. Theoretical motivation

In order to develop a conceptual basis for the study of social cohesion in the refugee return context, we combine four strands of literature. First, the effect of violence on out-group cooperation. Second, the effect of international displacement and return on identity formation. Third, the implications of threats to community homogeneity. Fourth, the role of resource scarcity in affecting social cohesion.

### (i) Out-group cooperation after conflict

The evidence from multiple countries suggests that exposure to violence leads to more prosocial behaviour (Bauer *et al.*, 2016). This includes a myriad activities from behaving more altruistically (including in lab games) to a higher likelihood of joining social groups (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Voors *et al.*, 2012; Gilligan *et al.*, 2014).

The increase in prosocial behaviour is towards one's own identity group. In fact, conflict reinforces societal divisions between groups. For example, Bauer *et al.* (2014) conducted several experiments to explore in-group and out-group cooperation in Sierra Leone. They found that those more exposed to violence behaved more altruistically towards in-group members compared to those less exposed. However, this effect was not present for out-group members.

The explanations behind these changes in response to violence exposure remain unclear. Bauer *et al.* (2016), in a review of the subject, suggest that changes in parochial norms and preferences are likely to play a role in the explanation. In particular, evolutionary research suggests that the historical process of intergroup competition leads to adaptive psychological responses that promote in-group success (Boyd *et al.*, 2003). This behaviour intensifies when there is more intergroup competition.

### (ii) International displacement, return, and identity formation

It is important to relate the distinct effect of violence on cooperation with in-group and out-group members to repatriation. Group membership is often based around a marker of identity such as belonging to a clan or ethnic group. Exclusion of others is more likely when it is possible to form groups along one of these identity lines (Caselli and Coleman, 2013).

Based on the literature on conflict, identity formation, and forced migration, we posit that location during the war can be a clear marker of identity and that the process of displacement and return can create diverging identities between returnees and stayees. Returnees share the common experience of escaping conflict, adapting to life abroad, sometimes even growing up abroad, and returning home (with many being forced to return). Stayees, on the other hand, can have different perceptions on patriotism, nationhood, and deservedness of limited community resources given their role in protecting these resources during the conflict.

There is evidence of group identification based on location during the war. Schwartz (2019) conducted ethnographic work in Burundi during 2015 and found that individuals in different communities made a distinction between the *Les Rapatriés* and *Les Résidents* and even used other labels such as 'the Tanzanians' in reference to returnees.

She explains that ‘migration-related divisions not only cut across ethnicity, but frequently divided families where members had lived on either side of the border during the war. As such, migration-related categorizations existed independent of, though sometimes associated with, ethnic categorizations’ (Schwartz, 2019).

This supports the idea that returnees are likely to be seen as out-group members by stayees and vice versa. These divisions have implications for social cohesion in communities that have been exposed to conflict and in which we would expect less cooperation with out-group members. This leads us to expect that repatriation will have a negative impact on social cohesion and for that effect to be stronger in communities with more signs of migration-related divisions.

### (iii) Community homogeneity

The level of diversity of the receiving community in terms of key markers of identity also plays a role. For instance, there is a literature on the implications of multiculturalism (Crisp and Meleady, 2012) and the evidence suggests that individuals often react negatively to threats to homogeneity, at least in the short term. Human evolution models suggest that the brain evolved to sustain motivated cognition and behaviour relevant to in-group survival and cooperation, and to protect against threats from out-groups (Ramos *et al.*, 2019).

In communities that are more homogeneous in relation to other key markers of identity, the arrival of returnees with a different identity can have a more adverse effect on social cohesion.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we would expect the effect of repatriation on social cohesion to be more negative in communities with less diversity related to other factors.

### (iv) Competition for scarce resources

Finally, in addition to pure identity issues, refugee return could reduce social cohesion because of the additional competition for scarce resources. For example, Prediger *et al.* (2014) present evidence from Namibia on the positive link between scarcity and antisocial behaviour. This effect should be greater for those resources (e.g. fertile land) in which the scarcity cannot be solved in the short term. Based on this we would expect the effect of repatriation on social cohesion to be more negative in communities in which resources are scarcer.

## III. Research design

### (i) Context

In order to explore the conceptual ideas presented above we looked for case studies with three characteristics. First, in order for the effects to be perceivable, we need the volume of repatriation to be substantial relative to the size of the country’s population.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that in this study we were not allowed to collect information on ethnic identity of either stayees or returnees.

Therefore, we need to consider countries that have experienced large outflows of refugees and inflows of returnees later on. Second, we need a substantial portion of the refugees to spend about a decade or more abroad (protracted displacement) in order to allow enough time for the possible development of separate identities between stayees and returnees. Third, we need a country in which there is scarcity of natural resources, such as fertile land.

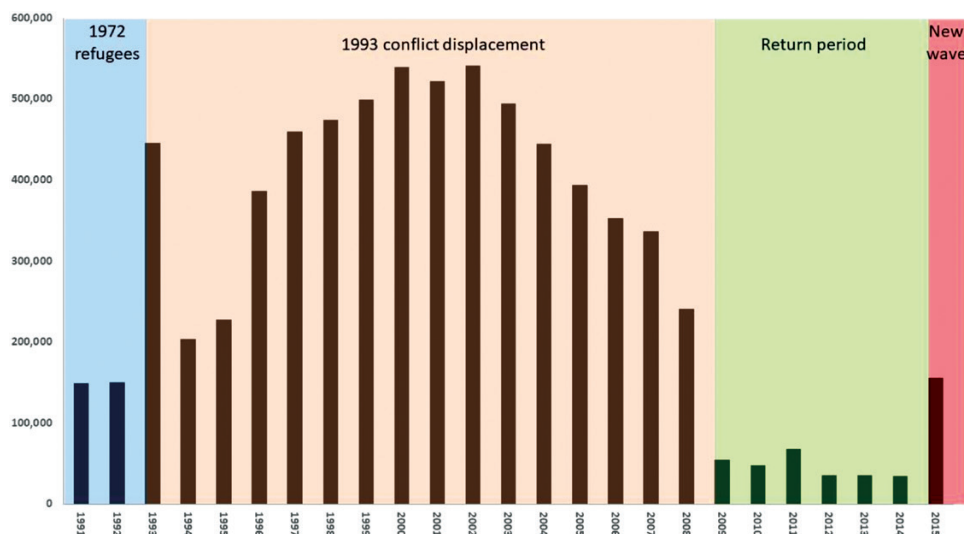
In the analysis, we focus on Burundi, a country that has these three characteristics. While we explore a single case study, there are multiple countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan) which have these three characteristics (i.e. large inflows of returnees, long period abroad, scarce natural resources) and for which the results are relevant. The research could also be relevant for countries in which the initial emigration was due to reasons other than widespread conflict, including natural disasters (e.g. El Salvador, Haiti).

There are four different stages related to Burundi–Tanzania displacement (Figure 1). There were over 150,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania prior to 1993. These refugees fled Burundi in 1972 and most of them have since been offered citizenship by Tanzania. Burundi experienced a conflict from 1993 to 2005, which led to another major refugee outflow. Ethnic rivalries (Hutus versus Tutsis) have historically played a key role in Burundian conflicts, although the 1993 conflict dynamics expand beyond simple ethnic tensions (Ndikumana, 2005). At the peak of the crisis there were over 500,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania.

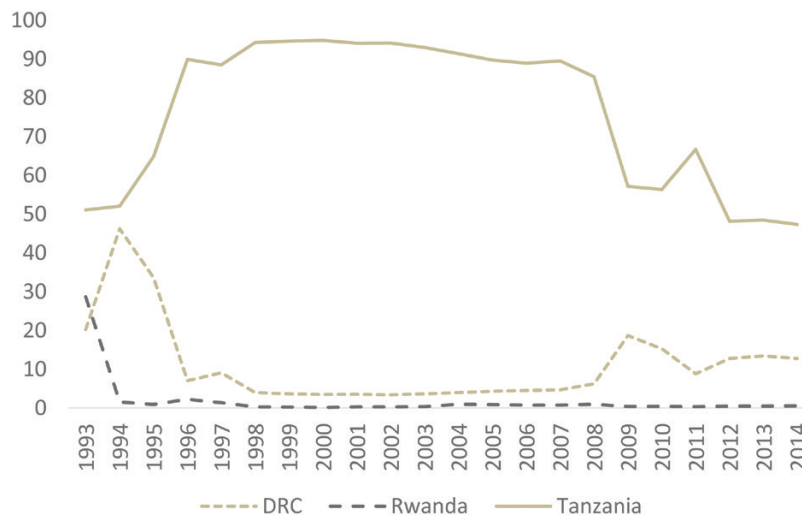
Note that while there were some Burundian refugees in other countries in the region, Tanzania was by far the main host of Burundian refugees from the 1993 conflict, with over 90 per cent of the total from 1996 onwards (Figure 2).

In Burundi, most of the displacement occurred on foot, and distance to the safe haven (i.e. Tanzania) played a key role in international displacement patterns. As shown

**Figure 1:** Displacement and conflict stages: stock of Burundian refugees in Tanzania.



Source: UNHCR, 2021.

**Figure 2:** Main locations of Burundian refugees (% in each country).

Source: UNHCR, 2021.

in Figure 3, those provinces which are closer to Tanzania generally had higher levels of international displacement than other provinces.

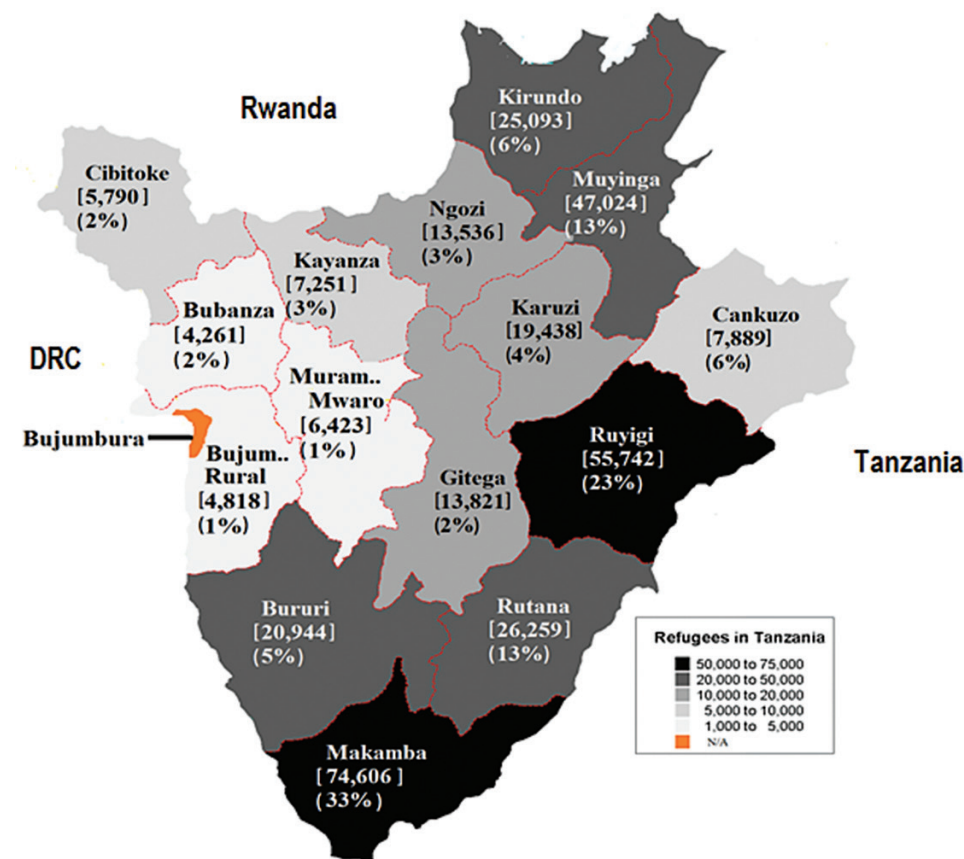
After the signing and implementation of the peace agreement, Tanzania closed the camps for the 1993 conflict refugees, ended official protection for this group and pushed them to return home.<sup>3</sup> By 2009, the large majority of refugees from the 1993 conflict had returned to Burundi, along with about 50,000 of the 1972 refugees. This period of return lasted for a few years until late 2015 when there was a new spike of displacement following an announcement from the President of Burundi that he was running for a third term in office, considered by some a violation of the peace agreements. As we explain in the next sub-section, this occurred after the end of data collection for this paper, therefore in our analysis we focus on the return period.

The agreement to end the conflict stated that refugees must be able to recover their property (Republic of Burundi, 2000), ‘especially their land’ (Protocol IV, Chapter 1, Article 8, 80). This was a strong incentive for former refugees to return to their communities of origin, the place in which they could claim land. The main challenge with this promise was that in practice there was insufficient land available to give returnees a landholding equivalent to their pre-exile land (van Leeuwen, 2010). Many of the solutions to land disputes involved land-sharing agreements (Ndayirukiye and Takeuchi, 2014).

There is no direct quantitative evidence on migration-related societal divisions in the country (i.e. returnees versus stayees). However, we do have data on attitudes towards emigration, remittances, and return that provide evidence of possible migration-related societal divisions.

<sup>3</sup> The peace agreement, officially known as The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, was originally signed in 2000, but it took several more years for all major parties involved in the conflict to agree to a ceasefire.



**Figure 3:** Refugees in Tanzania in 2005 by province of origin in Burundi.

Notes: Square brackets = number of refugees in Tanzania in 2005 which was originally from the given province in Burundi (UNHCR, 2021). Parenthesis = that number as a percentage share of the population of the provinces as estimated in the 1990 Burundi Census.

Table 1 reports the share of respondents who agreed with different statements regarding emigration, remittances, and return.<sup>4</sup> A third of respondents agree that emigration makes life harder for those who stay behind, 62 per cent do not agree that Burundians abroad still contribute to their country, and a quarter agreed that they have abandoned Burundi. Panel C of Table 1 provides responses to questions that are specific about returnees. Close to a quarter of respondents agree that returnees do not fit in, and close to 67 per cent agree that they get preferential treatment.

In the analysis we also explore how the results change for different sub-samples based on the ethnic composition of the communities. The initial expectation is that in less diverse communities refugee return can have a more adverse effect on social cohesion.

<sup>4</sup> For Table 1 the sample is limited to stayee households in the 2011 round of the main survey that we used for the empirical analysis. In the main analysis we focus on the 2015 round of the survey. Details of the survey are provided in section III(ii).

**Table 1:** Attitude towards emigration and return (share agree %, 2011, stayees only)

	All	Ethnic diversity		Land availability (pre-1993 war)	
		Less	More	Less	More
Panel A: When people leave the country					
It makes life harder for those who stay	32.01	22.10	39.34	29.41	35.39
They still contribute to the country of origin	38.24	39.61	37.15	34.84	42.52
They are able to support families in country of origin	68.38	64.34	71.51	67.08	70.43
They abandon their country	25.42	24.65	26.01	22.55	27.83
They get rich	59.54	60.15	59.09	57.70	61.61
Panel B: When people receive money from abroad					
They become lazier	18.48	16.36	20.06	16.97	19.87
It leads to resentment from others	64.17	63.77	64.46	61.79	66.36
They get rich	51.91	54.04	50.38	52.02	51.62
It helps develop our country	48.33	42.63	52.44	47.42	49.32
Panel C: When people who have lived abroad come back they					
Help the country	57.98	53.85	61.01	58.50	56.85
Do not fit in	23.47	25.00	22.32	23.47	23.83
Bring new ideas, knowledge, and technology	68.65	68.35	68.87	68.28	68.59
Receive preferential treatment	66.83	64.62	68.51	66.45	67.00

Regarding ethnic composition, the Hutu group accounts for close to 85 per cent of Burundi's population, with Tutsis and the Twa accounting for 14 and 1 per cent, respectively. We consider a community less ethnically diverse if the majority group accounts for 90 per cent or more of the population. Close to 45 per cent of the respondents in our sample live in less ethnically diverse communities.

Table 1 suggests that some attitudes towards emigration, remittances, and return are different for less and more ethnically diverse communities. For instance, the share agreeing that returnees help the country is lower in less ethnically diverse communities (54 versus 61 per cent). Yet, the direction of the difference changes across questions.

We also divide the communities based on land scarcity before the 1993 conflict in order to explore the possible role of posterior rules regarding land provision to returnees. Respondents in communities that had more and less pre-war land available have broadly similar attitudes towards return.

## (ii) The survey

We collected the data during January to March 2015 as part of a nationwide survey. The survey had two components. First was a household survey in which 15 households were interviewed in 100 communities (i.e. *sous-collines*) across the 17 provinces of the country. The person providing the information on social cohesion measures was the household head. Second was a community survey in which a local leader was interviewed in each community. The number of communities selected in each province was based on information from the 2008 Census. Figure 4 indicates the location of the communities surveyed.

In the analysis below we focus on rural areas. In particular, we exclude from the analysis Bujumbura, which is the largest city of the country and the centre of commercial



**Figure 4:** Location of communities surveyed.

Note: Geolocation of the 100 communities sampled in the survey.

activity. Excluding Bujumbura from the analysis is common in studies in Burundi given the different dynamics in the city (Verwimp and Van Bavel, 2014; Fransen *et al.*, 2017).

The survey is a follow-up to one conducted with the same households in 2011. However, most of the variables related to social cohesion were only collected in 2015, hence the analysis in this paper focuses on that round.

### (iii) Measuring social cohesion

Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept. Therefore, we use different variables to measure it, including: (A) measures of support across households, (B) feelings towards conflict and reconciliation, (C) trust in others and in specific groups, and (D) participation in different community organizations.

Table 2 reports means for the dependent variables and the Online Appendix provides a description of all the variables included in the analysis (Table A1). We present the results for all respondents and then for sub-samples based on more/less ethnically diverse communities, those in communities with more/less pre-war land availability, and those in communities with better/worse attitudes towards return migration.

In order to construct an index to proxy migration-related divisions at the community level we add the four responses to the return question in Table 1, Panel C (i.e. help the country, fit in, bring new ideas, and receive preferential treatment), in a way in which

**Table 2:** Means of outcome variables

	Ethnic diversity				Land availability (pre-1993 war)		Negative attitude towards return	
	All	Less	More	Less	More	Less	More	
Panel A: Support	0.4343	0.4435	0.4235	0.4635	0.3982	0.4306	0.4348	
	0.5851	0.5612	0.6039	0.6180	0.5459	0.5694	0.5968	
	Panel B: Violence and reconciliation							
	0.9601	0.9568	0.9608	0.9583	0.9597	0.9689	0.9526	
	0.1330	0.1259	0.1350	0.1346	0.1315	0.1510	0.1186	
	0.7630	0.7663	0.7598	0.7678	0.7590	0.7957	0.7366	
	0.3730	0.4209	0.3347	0.4026	0.3349	0.3788	0.3705	
	Panel C: Trusts in							
	0.8898	0.8868	0.8922	0.8985	0.8724	0.8935	0.8793	
	0.8862	0.8857	0.8845	0.8994	0.8792	0.9017	0.8792	
Panel D: Household members participating in	0.9223	0.9205	0.9235	0.9120	0.9329	0.9187	0.9266	
	0.8013	0.8101	0.7918	0.8113	0.7830	0.8201	0.7861	
	0.7652	0.8010	0.7366	0.7851	0.7448	0.7700	0.7675	
	Panel D: Household members participating in							
	0.1229	0.1247	0.1216	0.1357	0.1096	0.1340	0.1146	
	0.1972	0.2014	0.1961	0.1733	0.2260	0.1794	0.2134	
	0.2274	0.2302	0.2275	0.2255	0.2304	0.2225	0.2332	
	0.3513	0.3741	0.3314	0.3528	0.3468	0.3540	0.3439	

higher values indicate worse attitudes, and create a dummy to indicate that the community is above the mean for this variable.

We start the analysis by looking at two variables to measure the degree to which individuals and households support each other (Panel A of Table 2). The first is a dummy indicating that the individual agrees that people in the community help each other at least most of the time. The second variable is a dummy that indicates that in case of an emergency the respondent could borrow money from someone in the community who was not a household member.

Next, we explore the role of factors related to violence and reconciliation (Panel B of Table 2). The first variable is a dummy indicating that the respondent considers that the community is mainly peaceful. The next variable is a dummy for those responding that a new conflict is unlikely. The third variable related to violence and reconciliation indicates that the respondent feels reconciled with the atrocities of the war. Finally, we use a dummy variable indicating that the respondent agrees that justice has been done to those who committed crimes during the war.

The next set of independent variables measures trust in different groups, including other ethnic groups, returnees, and ex-combatants (Panel C of Table 2). The last set of independent variables measures if a household member participates in different organizations, such as political and religious groups (Panel D of Table 2).

#### (iv) Regression specification

In the analysis we estimate a series of regressions along the following lines:

$$Y_i = \delta_j + \beta R_c + \varnothing H_i + \rho C_c + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_i$  represents one of the indicators of social cohesion explained above,  $\delta_j$  is the province indicator,  $R_c$  is the share of returnees in the community,  $H_i$  indicates a series of household level controls, and  $C_c$  are a series of community level of controls. The Online Appendix (Table A2) includes the descriptive statistics for the control variables. We present results for the full sample and sub-samples based on communities with lower/higher ethnic diversity, less/more pre-1993 war land availability, and better/worse attitudes towards return.

Before presenting our identification strategy it is important to highlight that there is evidence that exposure to conflict in Burundi was generalized (Uvin, 1999). In particular, that it was unrelated to political allegiances or wealth levels (Voors *et al.*, 2012). In the analysis, we include multiple variables to account for conflict exposure at the household and community level. These include: experiencing land disputes, the death/disablement of a family member during the conflict, and experiencing restrictions on movement.

#### (v) Identification

Tanzania mandated the return of Burundian refugees from the 1993 conflict. Returnees had a strong incentive to return to their communities of origin as this was the place in which they could claim land. The main concern regarding identification is that

communities with large levels of displacement, and more returnees later on, could be inherently different from other communities.

In the estimation, we use the geographical characteristics of the communities of origin for identification purposes. In particular, we use the logarithm of the inverse of distance to the border of Tanzania (proximity) and the logarithm of the inverse of altitude (flatness) as instruments for the share of returnees in the population.

The idea is that once we control for conflict exposure, displacement largely depends on the accessibility of a safe haven. In Burundi, most of the displacement occurred on foot and therefore distance to the border and altitude affected the level of international displacement from any given community (see [Figure 3](#)).

The [Online Appendix \(Table A4\)](#) reports the results of the first-stage estimation along with relevant tests. The estimation complies with the standard required tests. The main concern about the instruments is that proximity and flatness could relate to unobserved factors that affect variables related to social cohesion. We conduct several analyses to explore this possibility and feel confident that this is not the case. See [Table A5](#) in the [Online Appendix](#) for further details.

## IV. Results

In the discussion we focus on the coefficient on the population share of refugees from IV regressions with full controls. Each table presents the coefficients on the refugee share of the population from separate regressions: full sample, less diverse communities, more diverse communities, communities with less pre-war land availability, communities with more pre-war land availability, communities with less negative attitudes towards return, and communities with more negative attitudes towards return.

### (i) Support measures

[Table 3](#) reports the results measuring the degree to which individuals and households support each other. First, we measure the impact of refugee return on the perception that members of the community help each other at least most of the time (Panel A). The coefficient is negative and statistically significant in the specification with the full sample. The results suggest that a 10 percentage point increase in the population share of returnees in a community leads to a 10.3 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of stating that community members mostly help each other. This is consistent with the expectations discussed in section II.

Note that the coefficient is substantially larger in communities with more negative attitudes towards return, which are less ethnically diverse and with less pre-war land availability. This supports our initial expectations regarding the communities in which the impact of refugee return should be more negative.

Next, we explore the impact of refugee return on the possibility of borrowing money for emergencies from individuals outside the household (Panel B). Here also the coefficients are negative. Looking at the main estimation, the coefficient suggests that a 10 percentage point increase in the population share of returnees decreases the possibility of borrowing money this way by 8.4 percentage points.

Table 3: Relationship of measures of support with refugee return

Variable	All		Ethnic diversity		Land availability (pre-1993 war)		Negative attitude towards return	
	(1)	(2)	Less	More	Less	More	Less	More
Share returnees	-0.2250*	-1.0266***	-1.5623**	-0.5991	-1.3433*	-0.6368	-0.3018	-0.6068*
Observations	926	926	(0.7959) 417	(0.4814) 509	(0.7202) 479	(0.4191) 447	(0.6305) 433	(0.3472) 493
Share returnees	-0.2128*	-0.8397**	-0.2273	-1.2657**	-1.5393**	-0.2017	-0.9524*	-0.3854
Observations	926	926	(0.7136) 417	(0.5005) 509	(0.6945) 479	(0.4027) 447	(0.5612) 433	(0.3308) 493
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IV		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Notes: \* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 10% level, \*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 5% level, \*\*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 1% level. Standard errors are included in parentheses.

However, the dynamics across sub-samples of communities are different than for the previous variable. Now the coefficient is larger for more ethnically diverse communities and for communities with more positive attitudes towards return. This is contrary to our original expectations and can reflect, among other things, the degree to which indicators of social cohesion, even the ones related to support among community members, reflect different factors. It is still the case that the coefficient for communities with less pre-war land availability is larger than for other communities.

### (ii) Violence and reconciliation measures

Table 4 presents the results for the impact of refugee return on violence and reconciliation measures. First, we consider the question of whether the community is generally perceived as a peaceful community (Panel A). The results in Table 4 suggest that a 10 percentage point increase in the population share of refugees leads to a 5.6 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of perceiving the community as a peaceful one. The coefficient is similar across more and less diverse communities. The story changes if we divide communities on attitudes towards return. In those communities with more negative attitudes towards return the coefficient is larger and statically significant.

The coefficients are mostly statistically insignificant for the other three measures of violence and reconciliation. Key exceptions are the coefficients on war reconciliation and justice for communities with more negative attitudes towards return. In both cases the coefficient is negative, larger than for other communities and statistically significant.

### (iii) Trust

Table 5 presents the results related to trust towards different groups. There are several interesting patterns in the results. First, looking at the main coefficients we see that, even if none is statically significant, all are positive. This contrasts with the previous results in which refugee return had negative effects on different measures related to social cohesion.

Second, the effect of refugee return is substantially more positive in communities that are less diverse. In other words, the effect on trust is more positive in the same types of communities in which the effect on other measures of social cohesion was more negative. In this case, the coefficients are significant for trust towards other ethnic groups (Panel C) and community leaders (Panel D). A 10 percentage point increase in the population share of returnees increases trust in other ethnic groups and community leaders by 6.5 and 9.7 percentage points, respectively. The increase in trust towards other ethnic groups is not necessarily at odds with our expectations. It could be the result of the gradual process of replacing ethnic identification as a social marker (and the associated ethnic tensions) by migration-related divisions.

Third, higher levels of refugee return lead to greater trust in returnees in communities with higher pre-war levels of land availability. Finally, the impact of refugee return on social trust is higher on those communities with more positive attitudes towards return. In this case, the coefficient is statistically significant for trust towards other people in the community and community leaders.



**Table 4:** Relationship of violence and reconciliation measures with refugee return

Variable	(1)	(2)	Ethnic diversity		Land availability (pre-1993 war)		Negative attitude towards return	
			Less	More	Less	More	Less	More
			(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>Panel A: Peaceful community</b>								
Share returnees	-0.0805 (0.0641)	-0.5604*** (0.2174)	-0.6088* (0.3319)	-0.5274** (0.2684)	-0.5474 (0.3551)	-0.1649 (0.2080)	-0.2792 (0.25470)	-0.6054*** (0.2281)
Observations	925	925	418	507	478	447	433	492
<b>Panel B: Unlikely reoccurrence of conflict</b>								
Share returnees	-0.0685 (0.0867)	0.4294* (0.2356)	-0.0772 (0.4078)	0.2518 (0.2985)	-0.1221 (0.4173)	0.2580 (0.2242)	-0.2745 (0.4263)	0.3733 (0.2301)
Observations	893	893	406	487	467	426	418	475
<b>Panel C: Reconciled with war</b>								
Share returnees	0.0120 (0.1101)	-0.4072 (0.3340)	-0.1462 (0.6234)	-0.7793 (0.4750)	-0.8471 (0.6310)	0.1330 (0.3557)	-0.2617 (0.5070)	-0.5480* (0.3046)
Observations	922	922	417	505	477	445	431	491
<b>Panel D: Justice has been done</b>								
Share returnees	-0.1051 (0.1220)	-0.1158 (0.3651)	0.3941 (0.7094)	-0.4333 (0.4764)	0.6145 (0.6516)	-0.4322 (0.4028)	-0.4324 (0.6252)	-0.5737* (0.3131)
Observations	871	871	393	478	456	415	410	461
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IV		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Notes: \* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 10% level, \*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 5% level, \*\*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 1% level. Standard errors are included in parentheses.

**Table 5:** Relationship of trust measures with refugee return

Variable	Ethnic diversity			Land availability (pre-1993 war)		Negative attitude towards return	
	All	Less	More	Less	More	Less	More
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<b>Panel A: People in the community</b>							
Share returnees	0.0676 (0.0812)	0.1553 (0.2633)	0.4281 (0.4211)	0.0782 (0.3626)	0.3059 (0.4408)	0.3981 (0.2688)	-0.1306 (0.2826)
Observations	923	923	416	507	476	447	491
<b>Panel B: Trust returnees</b>							
Share returnees	0.1229* (0.0751)	0.0625 (0.2719)	0.1843 (0.4594)	0.0571 (0.3692)	0.1868 (0.4933)	0.6015** (0.2697)	-0.0716 (0.2654)
Observations	911	911	412	499	472	439	483
<b>Panel C: Other ethnic groups</b>							
Share returnees	0.0391 (0.0747)	0.2126 (0.2344)	0.6529* (0.3518)	0.0883 (0.3230)	0.5119 (0.4528)	0.3514 (0.2162)	-0.0632 (0.2349)
Observations	923	923	416	507	476	447	490
<b>Panel D: Community leaders</b>							
Share returnees	0.0656 (0.1052)	0.3855 (0.2942)	0.9687* (0.5065)	-0.1274 (0.4520)	0.8720* (0.5147)	0.2884 (0.3359)	0.3071 (0.2742)
Observations	923	923	417	506	476	447	491
<b>Panel E: Ex-combatants</b>							
Share returnees	-0.0940 (0.1135)	0.2543 (0.3159)	0.6547 (0.5648)	-0.0535 (0.4514)	0.9539 (0.6072)	0.3757 (0.3455)	0.0148 (0.2894)
Observations	900	900	398	502	469	431	473
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Notes: \* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 10% level, \*\*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 1% level. Standard errors are included in parentheses.

#### (iv) Community participation

Table 6 reports the results for the level of participation in community activities. Overall, the results suggest mixed dynamics regarding the impact of refugee return on participation in community activities. Refugee return leads to more participation in agricultural cooperatives in communities with less ethnic diversity, more pre-war land availability, and worse attitudes towards return.

The coefficients that are statistically significant for the other three types of community participation are all negative. Repatriation has a negative impact on participation in credit/savings associations in more diverse communities and in those with higher pre-war land availability. Refugee return has a negative impact on participation in political organizations in communities with less pre-war land availability and more positive attitudes towards return.

#### (v) Robustness

We conduct two key robustness checks. First, we explore the results if we limit the sample to stayees only, which can be a way of isolating the effects of return. Limiting the sample does not change the results in substantial ways (see Table A6 in the Online Appendix).

In a second robustness check, we check the implications of changing our measure of the returnee share of the population. In the main estimations, the share of returnees in the population is constructed with information from the survey roster. This information is more accurate for some communities than others, given the variation in community size. Therefore, we also present results with an alternative measure constructed from the information provided by community leaders, which includes information on the number of returnees in the community as well as overall population. The results are also similar with this alternative measure (see Table A6 in the Online Appendix).

### V. Summary and policy implications

Repatriation involves the re-encounter of individuals who were separated for years and often decades and can have major implications for social cohesion at the community level. However, while there is a growing body of evidence on the impacts of forced migration on host communities (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2013; Becker and Ferrara, 2019; Verme and Schuettler, 2021), there is scarce research on the impacts of refugee return and particularly, on return and social cohesion (De Berry and Roberts, 2018). In order to fill this gap, we explore these issues in Burundi, a country that experienced a major conflict and outflow of people, followed by large flows of refugee return a decade later.

Social cohesion is a multidimensional concept. We focus on aspects related to support across households, violence and reconciliation, trust, and participation in community groups. The results suggest varying impacts of refugee return on different aspects of social cohesion. The stronger effects suggest that refugee return has a negative impact on the feeling that community members help each other, could borrow money for emergencies from non-household members, and that the community is peaceful. The

**Table 6:** Relationship of household participation in community activities with refugee return

Variable	Ethnic diversity				Land availability (pre-1993 war)		Negative attitude towards return	
	All	(2)	Less	More	Less	More	Less	More
			(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1)								
Panel A: Agricultural cooperative								
Share returnees	0.1369*	0.2089	1.1359*** (0.423)	-0.3783 (0.2677)	-0.1049 (0.4038)	0.3351* (0.1839)	-0.5744 (0.4233)	0.2339* (0.1407)
Observations	925	925	418	507	478	447	433	492
Panel B: Credit/savings association								
Share returnees	-0.1831* (0.0982)	-0.3369 (0.2835)	0.5512 (0.6420)	-0.783** (0.2647)	-0.2981 (0.3906)	-0.6218* (0.3214)	-0.4165 (0.3754)	-0.0233 (0.2573)
Observations	925	925	418	507	478	447	433	492
Panel C: Religious group/organization								
Share returnees	0.0409 (0.1100)	-0.5050 (0.3126)	-0.8514 (0.6293)	-0.3649 (0.4079)	-1.0871* (0.5635)	0.2636 (0.3598)	0.1426 (0.5167)	-0.3846 (0.2766)
Observations	925	925	418	507	478	447	433	492
Panel D: Political party/group								
Share returnees	0.0316 (0.1207)	-0.1172 (0.3441)	-0.2714 (0.6788)	-0.0977 (0.4650)	-1.0478* (0.6400)	-0.0612 (0.3730)	-1.5484** (0.6523)	0.0687 (0.3282)
Observations	925	925	418	507	478	447	433	492
Controls	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
IV		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Notes: \* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 10% level, \*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 5% level, \*\*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at the 1% level. Standard errors are included in parentheses.

estimated impacts on measures of reconciliation, post-conflict justice, trust, and participation in community groups are mostly statistically insignificant.

Given that the effect was stronger for the feeling that community members help each other, we focus more on this variable to explore the results related to the sub-samples. Our expectation based on the conceptual framework is that the effect of repatriation on social cohesion should be more negative in communities with stronger signs of migration-related divisions. We place particular attention on attitudes towards returnees, which we take as a proxy of 'us' *versus* 'them', that is, for the possible existence of migration-related identities (i.e. stayees versus returnees). The results confirm that the negative effect on the feeling that community members help each other tends to be stronger in communities with worse attitudes towards refugee return.

We also expected the effect of repatriation on social cohesion to be more negative in communities with less diversity related to other factors. We place particular attention on ethnicity, which is a major marker of identity in Burundi. The results confirm that the negative effect on the feeling that community members help each other tends to be stronger in communities with less ethnic diversity.

Finally, we posit that the effect of repatriation on social cohesion should be more negative in communities in which resources are scarcer. In the analysis we focus on land, which is scarce in Burundi. The results confirm that the negative effect on the feeling that community members help each other tends to be stronger in communities with less pre-war land availability.

Overall, the results suggest that there is not a single mechanism related to refugee return that can cover all aspects of a complex concept such as social cohesion. In addition, there are important difficulties in measuring these outcomes, which range from social desirability bias to definition issues. However, even with these limitations, the results do suggest that the process of out-migration and return could lead to new divisions in society based on the location of individuals during the conflict.

These effects could be present in other countries and even supersede (or get mixed with) previous societal divisions. Moreover, while we focus on refugee return, similar dynamics related to migration-driven divisions could be present in other situations of return migration, such as the return of economic migrants, or even other situations of forced displacement, such as those displaced by natural disasters.

What does this mean for policy interventions in societies experiencing high levels of repatriation? Social cohesion is an area for which it is difficult to isolate single factors and shape policy around them. However, it is possible to identify the type of issues and communities that need particular attention at the policy design stage. For instance, policy efforts will require understanding the dynamics behind new migration-related divisions. We cannot expect returnees and stayees to assume their previous identities after repatriation.

Our results suggest that one policy priority would be to tailor the support provided to returnees to the characteristics of the communities to which they return, or at least to provide some customized support in communities which are identified as more negatively predisposed toward returnees. It is also important to understand that returning refugees to their communities of origin may not always be the best option. A strategic matching process which offers returnees more realistic options to select other areas of return could lead to better social cohesion outcomes.

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