

# Education as an essential component of prevention of youth re-displacement

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Given that education is seen as a factor that keeps refugees in camps or host communities rather than encouraging them to go back home, it is ironic that it is not systematically included as part of return. Our experience in Burundi is that access to education is not only a right but also essential to the sustainability of return for younger people and thus to preventing their re-displacement. Consistent access to appropriate education underpins social reintegration of young returnees and thus the prevention of displacement in the longer term. Education should thus be a core part of repatriation plans.

Lack of structural planning for young people especially in terms of continuity of education once they crossed back to Burundi from Tanzania has had a detrimental effect on their ability to integrate into schools there. In Tanzania secondary school enrolment was 23% lower than for those who remained in Burundi. Paradoxically after their return the level was 55% lower than for those who had never left.<sup>1</sup>

We found that the difficulties faced by young returnees included poverty, leading to families' inability to pay for their children's education-related costs (uniforms, books, etc); limited capacity of the Burundian education system to absorb the returnees in the public schools; lack of school certificates showing their level of educational attainment in exile, which prevented them from being admitted to Burundian schools; unfamiliarity with the language of instruction (language instruction not only

helps young people in their achievements at school but also in attaining a sense of belonging and shared common identity); and the need to catch up with subjects that were missing from the curriculum in Tanzania.

Young returnees interviewed who were not going to school found it harder to reintegrate in general, to the point where they would recommend to refugees still in Mtabila, the one remaining camp for Burundian refugees in Tanzania, to remain in Tanzania while those who were going to school had more solid plans for their own future and easily envision staying in their home country. On the whole girls found it harder to integrate than boys, mostly because of the hostile school environment, they reported.

Finally, to ensure the successful repatriation of young people, cross-border commitment and continuity of support are needed for education activities that are shown to contribute to social integration, peace, stability, poverty reduction and therefore permanent return.

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1. Based on an impact study conducted by the RET in Burundi between September 2011 and March 2012. For more details, please contact the RET.