

Kirundi Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: Burundi

Primary Language(s): Kirundi, French, Swahili

Percent of Iowa's Population: Less than 1%

Background

The original settlers of Burundi are thought to be Twa people until Hutu people arrived from the West and began to outnumber them. The Twa people then retreated into the highlands while the Hutus migrated and gained control of Burundi. In 1885 Germany claimed the Burundi territory until 1916 when Belgium gained control. Independence was declared in 1962 and the area then became ruled by a third population, the Tutsis. The area has remained conflicted with coup attempts, assassinations, and bloodshed. The Burundian Civil War between the Tutsis and Hutu was from 1993-2005 and ended with the swearing in of the Burundi president in 2005. The Hutu and Tutsi tribes remain much divided even today. Tutsi members are traditionally cattle herders while the Hutu tribes are farmers. The Tutsi consider themselves the ruling party of the country even though the Hutu outnumber them. There are still some Twa people who live in the forest as hunter-gatherers, but they remain isolated from both the Hutu and Tutsi tribes and only make up 1% of the Burundi population.(1,2) Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, in which close to 75% of its population of 10.8 million live below the poverty line. Burundi's economy mainly relies on the agriculture of coffee, although there are also banana and tea plantations there. (3) Burundi has 13 cities with a population of 10,000 or above; 92% live in family groupings that are scattered throughout the highlands. Burundian village homes today are made with mud and sticks, although wood and cement blocks also are used. The roofs are usually tin, since leaves are in short supply as a result of deforestation. Each house is surrounded by a courtyard, and several houses are grouped together inside a wall of mud and sticks.(1) There are a number of villages that draw people in to buy, sell, and trade agricultural products and handicrafts.(1)



Burundi is one of the smallest countries located in central Africa.



Traditional Burundian dancer and drummers performing in Bujumbura, Burundi.(12)

Education and Literacy

Only about half of the country of Burundi is literate. Primary education begins at age seven followed by secondary education after six years of primary education. Education in Burundi is free and is in the Kirundi language at the primary level and French at the secondary level. A small fraction of students from primary school are admitted to secondary level and even less students are admitted to the only college in the country.

Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

Birth usually occurs at home, assisted by midwives and other women. Six days after a baby is born, a ceremony called *ujusohor* is observed in which the new baby is presented to the family. The mother receives a crown of flowers and gifts of beer and money. The paternal grandfather bestows on the child a proper name and one or two nicknames during what is called the *kuvamukiriri* ceremony. If the family is Christian, baptism occurs at the same time. Often this is not done until the child reaches the age of about one year, as infant mortality is high.

Children are breastfed for as long as possible. At age two or three, they begin to be fed the typical national diet. Mothers generally tie their babies to their backs (or when they are older, perch them on their hips) and carry them everywhere. (1)

Holidays & Celebrations

Burundis celebrate Christmas and other traditional holidays. July 1 is Independence Day, and many cultural festivities are observed. *Kubandwa* is one of the most important religious festivals, which celebrates the grain harvest and pays homage to Kiranga, a spirit who is the leader of all the dead ancestors. At this ceremony, young men decorate their bodies and engage in traditional chants and dances; one of them dresses as Kiranga. At the end of the festival, people bathe in a stream in a cleansing ritual. Another central ritual is a fertility ceremony called *umuganuro*, in which a sacred drum is played and a virgin plants the first sorghum seeds to assure a good harvest.(1)

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Health Disparities

Health concerns are similar to refugees from other African countries and include tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, high lead levels, anemia, vision problems, hypertension, diabetes, hearing problems and high risk pregnancies. Malaria and typhoid fever are also common. Burundi people also have the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition in the world. Infant mortality is high in Burundi at over 6% of all births and 1 out of 10 children in Burundi die before the age of 5 from preventable and treatable illnesses such as pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria. (4) The social welfare of Burundi only provides health care to those who are employed and earn a salary. This leaves more than two million people without access to formal health care. (1)

Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

Common foods found in Burundi are primarily plant based foods. Foods found in the daily diet are sweet potatoes, peas, corn, beans, bananas, plantains, cassava, millet and sorghum. Sorghum is ground and used for porridge or pancakes. Foods in Burundi are mostly boiled, stewed or roasted over a fire. Meat is rarely consumed and fish is only consumed around the area of Lake Tanganyika.(1)(9) Families in Burundi have 1-2 meals per day and large quantities are eaten at meals. As part of tradition, Burundi families eat their main meal around 3:00 p.m. and typically everyone in the household attends depending on work or school schedules. In the villages in Burundi meals are generally eaten from large communal dishes with fingers using the starchy portion to dip in the sauce or stew. In urban areas meals are more often served on individual plates. (11)

Considerations for WIC

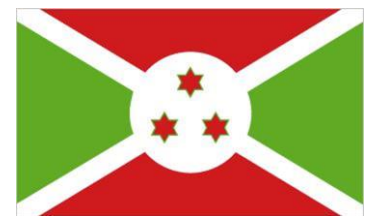
- It is considered rude to point at another person with the index finger. Trying to get another person's attention is usually accomplished by extending the arm with the palm downward and bringing the fingers toward the wrist. (1)
- Positive relationships can be developed by discussing topics related to family, home life, health and education. However, it is important to not ask questions as though you were filling out a questionnaire, as this is considered intrusive.(10)
- WIC offers some familiar food choices for families from Burundi. Beans, peas and lentils and money for fruits and vegetables are offered on WIC benefits similar to what families eat in Burundi. (9) WIC also provides oatmeal, Malt O Meal and Cream of Wheat which can be considered a comparable option for porridge.
- Always ask permission when touching a client or before taking measurements as physical contact can be viewed as inappropriate. (11)
- Instead of asking about typical set meal patterns, ask more about when food and beverages are consumed during the day. (11)

Why did we come to Iowa?

Citizens who leave the country seek asylum because of violence and repression. Hundreds have been killed and more than 400,000 citizens have fled to nearby Tanzania to live in refugee camps since 2015. (5)

Where are we living?

Burundi refugees make up a very small percentage of the total refugee population in Iowa. Since 2002, there have been about 283 people who have settled in the state of Iowa, with 87% of them living in Des Moines, 6% in Cedar Rapids, and 3.5% each in Clive and Perry. (6)



The National Flag is Red and green with a white diagonal cross and a central white disk incorporating three large stars. (7)