



Zimbabwe



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	570,000 – 1,000,000
Percentage of total population	4.6 – 8.0%
Start of current displacement situation	2000
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	Undetermined
New displacement	15,000

A substantial proportion of Zimbabwe's population is internally displaced, but in the absence of a comprehensive survey it is impossible to say with confidence exactly how many people are affected. The UN estimated that 570,000 people were made homeless by the urban demolitions of Operation Murambatsvina ("clear the filth") in 2005, while the government destroyed the homes of thousands of informal mine workers in Operation Chikorokoza Chapera ("stop the gold panning") in late 2006 and early 2007. In 2008, UNDP estimated that a total of a million farm workers and their families had lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the fast-track land reform programme which had led to the almost complete collapse of commercial farming in Zimbabwe since its inception in 2000. Estimates of the number of people displaced in 2008 by the electoral violence ranged between 36,000 and 200,000.

Farm invasions continued in 2009, leading to the displacement of 15,000 farm workers and their families. Urban evictions also continued, notably in Victoria Falls where the homes of 157 families were destroyed for failing to comply with building regulations. The families in question had previously been made homeless by Operation Murambatsvina, and had since been given permission by the authorities to stay in shacks. In addition, by the end of 2009, local communities in the Marange diamond area were under threat of arbitrary displacement in contravention of the law to make way for mining operations. By the end of the year, the majority of the people displaced in 2008 by electoral violence had been able to return to their homes, but some people were unable to return because their homes had been burnt down or because they feared further violence against their person.

A significant number of people have been displaced repeatedly by successive operations, making it even more difficult to produce reliable estimates for the total number of IDPs. Many farm workers who were displaced to the towns and cities were later caught up in Operation Murambatsvina. Many of the people internally displaced may have since been among the estimated three to four million Zimbabweans who have left the country due to violence and economic hardship.

The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009 led to some policy changes in relation to internal displacement. Previous governments led by President Mugabe had refused to acknowledge that government policies

and actions had led to internal displacement, and had objected to the use of the term IDPs with reference to displaced Zimbabweans. As a result, it had been impossible to profile displaced populations or assess their needs, and humanitarian organisations considered them among wider "mobile and vulnerable populations" (MVPs) instead. However, in August 2009, the GNU and UN agencies for the first time conducted a small-scale rapid IDP assessment, which used the IDP definition in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and referred explicitly to people displaced by natural disasters, politically-motivated violence and Operation Murambatsvina. Displacement caused by the fast-track land reform programme remained a sensitive issue, and the terms of reference referred instead to "those who have lost their residences as a result of losing their livelihoods". The government and the UN agreed that a nationwide assessment remained necessary to establish the scale of the displacement problem in the country and the extent of IDPs' needs.

In general terms, political developments allowed for enhanced humanitarian access to vulnerable populations in 2009, and resulted in greater engagement of the government with the international humanitarian community. One manifestation of this new climate was the activation of the Protection Cluster in 2009, which had initially remained a working group when other clusters were activated in 2008. The MVP working group became a sub-cluster of the Protection Cluster. Concerns remain, however, about a lack of coordination in relation to displacement and protection issues.

Despite the stabilisation of the economy in 2009, humanitarian needs remained acute and the general population benefited only marginally from improvements in the socio-economic situation. In many respects IDPs remained among the most vulnerable groups of all, lacking access for example to water and sanitation infrastructure which left them even more vulnerable than the rest of the population to cholera and other water-borne diseases. Generally IDPs are starting from an even lower base than non-displaced people, making it harder for them to rebuild their lives following the near-collapse of the economy in 2008. The durability of any settlement options for Zimbabwe's displaced people will depend on effective urban planning and changes to the building regulations for towns and cities, as well as a new approach to the distribution of farm land.