

Eritrea

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	Undetermined
Start of current displacement situation	1998
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	1,100,000 (2000)
New displacement in 2008	0
Returns in 2008	20,000–30,000
Causes of displacement	International armed conflict
Human development index	164

Massive displacement was witnessed in May 1998 as a result of border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Out of a population of 3.8 million Eritreans, over a million people were uprooted from their homes in the regions of Gash Barka and Debub.

Following a ceasefire in 2000 most of the people displaced returned to their home areas. In March 2001, 4,200 UN peacekeeping troops were deployed under the auspices of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) to monitor the ceasefire, and in April 2002 an independent Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) announced a virtual demarcation of the border which placed Badme in Eritrea. This decision was contested by the Ethiopian government, and no progress was made towards the implementation of the decision.

UN sources have reported that by March 2008, all IDPs had either returned or been resettled in new villages, though it was acknowledged that some might still be living with hosts.

The government in 2005 instituted a new policy which promoted self-reliance and discouraged international involvement, and the number of NGOs operating in the country fell sharply. UNDP did manage to engage the government in assisting with return and resettlement in areas of development, and remains as the lead UN agency on the reintegration of IDPs. However, the uneasy relationship between the government and UN and other international agencies has undermined efforts to find durable solutions for IDPs.

Concerns have been voiced about the viability of the returns, in particular because limited access to infrastructure, and livelihoods have threatened their sustainability. In 2007, UNICEF called for the urgent delivery of emergency items and basic social services for some 10,000 returnees.

For sustainable peace to be achieved, both Eritrea and Ethiopia need to have constructive dialogue and honour the binding decision of the Boundary Commission.

