

# Kenya

## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	300,000–600,000
Percentage of total population	0.8%–1.6%
Start of current displacement situation	2007
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	600,000 (February 2008)
New displacement in 2008	500,000
Returns in 2008	300,000 (Government estimate)
Causes of displacement	Generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	148



Generalised violence and human rights violations caused the displacement of an estimated 500,000 Kenyans in the wake of the December 2007 elections. The violence which followed the election was mostly concentrated around the Rift Valley, and to some extent in Nairobi slums and Nyanza and Western Provinces. In early 2008, swift international mediation culminated in a peace agreement and formation of a coalition government. However, the causes of the displacement are yet to be addressed conclusively, and tensions between communities remain high in areas such as the Rift Valley.

Violence in Kenya has recurred over many years, often due to grievances between the Kikuyu and indigenous communities like the Kalenjin and Maasai over land and the distribution of economic and political resources. Election-related violence in 1992 and 1997 also led to displacement in the Rift Valley.

In northern Kenya, small-scale displacement has been common due to fighting over water and pasture resources. A government security operation in Mandera in the north-east also led to displacement between September and December 2008. In the western area of Mount Elgon, displacement has since 2006 been caused by the activities of the Sabaot Land Defence Force militia and government operations to flush them out.

In the Rift Valley, many of the post-election IDPs spent 2008 in the large camps to which they fled, and subsequently in smaller transit sites to which the government encouraged them to move until the situation in their home areas allowed their return. According to the government, 300,000 IDPs returned home during the year; however, at the end of 2008 many of these were still relying on the support of host communities.

IDPs in the north-east faced added protection risks from security forces in what has historically been a “security zone”. Residents have fled in fear of mistreatment, and in September 2008 the Kenya National Commission for Human Rights (KNCHR) documented cases of gross human rights violations by security forces there. Pastoralists are also marginalised and pastoral areas lag behind in development. The State has made very little investment in transport, schools, health care or livelihoods development.

Generally, IDPs face myriad protection needs whether they are in camps, transit sites, or even where they have been

deemed to have returned or resettled. Livelihood opportunities in camps are virtually non-existent and education and health facilities are rudimentary. There were reports of school drop-outs, early marriages and child labour in most camps. Given that land disputes were at the heart of the conflict in all the IDPs’ areas of origin, many displaced people have remained unsuccessful in their attempts to return to their lands.

For durable solutions to become possible it would be necessary to address issues of land ownership and distribution across Kenya, strengthen democratic institutions, create employment opportunities, prosecute perpetrators of violence, and develop a coherent national policy on internal displacement. Nonetheless the government has started to address some of these issues. Kenya has ratified the Great Lakes Pact and is in the process of setting up local tribunals to deal with the issue of impunity. The Commission of Inquiry set up to look into the causes of the post-election violence has also recommended that a national IDP policy be enacted in line with the UN Guiding Principles.

The government’s return programme has been criticised for failing to adhere to the Guiding Principles in some instances. The Department for Mitigation and Resettlement in the Ministry of Special Programmes is responsible for resettling the post-election IDPs. The Department helped the majority of IDPs to return in 2008, but achieved little in its peace building or community relations roles, and it is yet to embark on a country-wide IDP profiling exercise, a necessary prerequisite to effective targeting of assistance.

The Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) became the official government partner and the first and principal organisation to respond to the crisis. The agency’s timely intervention and experience in responding to disasters such as drought and floods saved many lives. However, KRCS’ lack of experience in camp management left it ill-prepared for a crisis of this scale.

Though this crisis was not anticipated, the UN quickly adopted a cluster approach in January 2008, with UNHCR leading the protection cluster. The cluster approach has been broadly effective though critics have noted an excess of national coordination meetings in Nairobi at the expense of local coordination.