

Bangladesh



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	60,000–500,000
Percentage of total population	Up to 0.3%
Start of current displacement situation	1973
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	500,000 (2000)
New displacement	Undetermined



In 1973, armed conflict broke out in Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as the government rejected indigenous Jumma people’s demands for greater autonomy. In parallel with the escalating conflict, the government began relocating poor and landless Bengalis from the plains to the CHT as part of the scheme to manage overpopulation in the plains and to assert political control in the region. The relocation of 400,000 Bengalis to the CHT in the 1970s and 1980s fundamentally changed the demographic make-up of the CHT, ensuring that the Jumma became a minority. During this period, human rights violations including forced evictions and violent clashes with army-backed settlers displaced tens of thousands of Jumma people within the country and another 60,000 into neighbouring India.

More recently, sporadic clashes between two indigenous political groups in CHT, the United People’s Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (PCJSS) and the United People’s Democratic Front (UPDF) have also displaced an unknown number of people. Most settlers have been displaced closer to army camps for greater security, whereas displaced indigenous people have fled to more remote areas or to reserve forests, where access to health care and education is limited.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was signed in 1997 between the government and the PCJSS and its Shanti Bahini militia. The accord allowed for the refugees to be repatriated; however thousands of IDPs and returned refugees remain displaced due to unresolved property disputes as well as ongoing land-grabbing by the settler population. Many IDPs have remained without a durable settlement option because the peace accord has never been fully implemented.

The number of people internally displaced is unknown, and different estimates have been contested. In 2000, a government task force estimated the number of IDPs from the CHT at 500,000 people, but it was criticised for including the non-indigenous population in its count. In the same year, Amnesty International reported that 60,000 people were internally displaced, not including the non-indigenous population.

The Awami League Government which came to power after the December 2008 elections pledged full implementation of the peace accord, including assistance and reparation to those who lost their land. It set up a committee for its implementation, re-established the land commission and the task force on rehabilitation of returnee Jumma refugees and IDPs, and withdrew some 35 temporary military camps. However, as of

December 2009, there were still around 300 military camps in the region, and the work of the land commission and task force was hindered by lack of funding and human resources. Although donor governments had expressed interest in funding development projects in the CHT after the signing of the peace accord in 1997, both bilateral donors and UN agencies were yet to be mobilised in efforts to promote durable solutions for IDPs.

A possibly much larger number of members of religious minorities across Bangladesh have also been forcibly displaced as a result of discriminatory legislation. The Hindu community in particular lost much of its land due to the nationalist Vested Property Act of 1974, which authorised the government to confiscate property from individuals it considered an “enemy of the state”. Almost 750,000 Hindu families were dispossessed of agricultural land according to one survey; some of them were internally displaced and others left the country. Although the Act was repealed in 2001, the government has not yet taken measures to restitute land or compensate those affected.

Religious minorities, including the Ahmadi Islamic sect, have faced inter-communal violence, particularly between 2001 and 2006, when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party was in power. Evictions of Mady or Garo minorities continued to be reported in 2009. However, information on the figures or patterns of resulting displacement is not available.