

Bangladesh

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	60,000–500,000
Percentage of total population	Up to 0.3%
Start of current displacement situation	1997
New displacement in 2008	A few hundred
Returns in 2008	Undetermined
Causes of displacement	Internal armed conflict, human rights violations
Human development index	147



In 1976, armed conflict broke out in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as the government rejected indigenous Jumma tribal people's demands for greater recognition and constitutional safeguards. As the conflict escalated, the government began relocating poor and landless Bengalis from the plains to the CHT, including over 400,000 between 1979 and 1983. Forced evictions, atrocities related to the conflict, confiscation of land for military camps, and clashes with the new settlers displaced tens of thousands of tribal people within the country and another 65,000 into neighbouring India.

A peace accord in 1997 enabled the refugees to be repatriated but thousands of IDPs and returned refugees remain displaced due to unresolved issues relating to land and property restitution. Their number is still unknown, and virtually all parties contested the finding of a government task force that 500,000 people were displaced as of 2000; Amnesty International reported in the same year that 60,000 people were internally displaced.

Members of the Hindu minority were also displaced after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its coalition partners including two Islamic parties came to power in the 2001 elections; and since then a new wave of threats and violence against the Islamic Ahmadiyya sect may have caused displacement. However there is no current information on these situations.

In the CHT, the 1997 peace accord committed the government to close temporary military camps, but as of 2004 only 31 of an estimated 520 had been closed down and land-grabbing continued to force indigenous people to flee their homes. After the army's declaration of emergency rule in January 2007, settlers seized an estimated 4,500 acres of land from Jumma individuals and communities in 16 villages in Kagrachari district. It was reported that army personnel were directly involved in all these cases, inciting settlers and creating a climate of fear among Jumma villagers. By 2006, more than 40 former Jumma villages were occupied by settlers. In April 2008, settlers and soldiers burnt down seven villages after the army began a new settlement programme in the Sajek area.

During the years of the armed conflict, the Jumma were gathered by the army into cluster villages or went into hiding in forest areas. The forests, where many IDPs continue to live, are reserve forests, and the army has threatened to burn down IDPs' houses if they fail to return to their areas of origin.

Meanwhile, the army has reportedly made plans to move more Bengali settlers into the forest reserves. The IDPs in forest areas are believed to have endured a very high level of food insecurity, and little access to any health care; following eviction threats many have moved into more remote locations. They have no secure livelihoods because agriculture, use of forest products, and even the collection of firewood is illegal. The IDPs have established schools for their children in the reserve forests, but these are also deemed illegal.

IDPs have rejected a government rehabilitation package as it does not make guarantees for property restitution, and the 1997 accord has remained stalled due to disagreement over whether Bengali settlers should be considered as IDPs. Settlers have continued to move to tribal land despite the end of the armed conflict, and the government has continued to discourage the involvement of international agencies and donor states. UNDP has targeted IDPs and other vulnerable groups in its attempts to encourage development in the Hill Tracts; however the political and humanitarian situations are unlikely to change without a more extensive international presence.

The new civilian government of Bangladesh, which swept to power in December 2008, has committed itself to honouring the 1997 peace accord with the Jumma tribal people. It remains to be seen if this commitment results in the end of new displacements and durable solutions for those displaced during the years of the armed conflict.