

Country Profile: Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has an economy in crisis, rampant inflation, and shortages of food and fuel. The country has also faced international isolation over human rights abuses.

HISTORY

The fortunes of Zimbabwe have for almost three decades been tied to President Robert Mugabe who wrested control from a small white community and became the country's first black leader. Now, as part of a government of national unity, he presides over a nation with a ruined economy, where poverty and unemployment are endemic and political strife and repression have been commonplace. The former Rhodesia has a history of conflict, with white settlers dispossessing the resident population, guerrilla armies forcing the white government to submit to elections, and the post-independence leadership committing atrocities in southern areas where it lacked the support of the Matabele people. Zimbabwe has had a rocky relationship with the Commonwealth - it was suspended after President Mugabe's controversial re-election in 2002 and later announced that it was pulling out for good. President Robert Mugabe, in office since 1980, has been accused of resorting to heavy-handed methods to remain in power. He won the 2008 presidential election only after it was reduced to a one-man race.

RECENT SITUATION

Zimbabwe is home to the Victoria Falls, the stone enclosures of Great Zimbabwe - remnants of a past empire - and to herds of elephant and other game roaming vast stretches of wilderness. For years it was a major tobacco producer and a potential bread basket for surrounding countries. However, the policies, corruption and repressive governance of the ruling ZANU-PF-party bear primary responsibility for the severe economic slide, growing public discontent and international isolation of the country. The forced seizure of almost all commercial farms led to sharp falls in production and precipitated the collapse of the agriculture-based economy. By April 2008, the annual inflation rate was over 165,000%, the world's highest. Unemployment is over 85%, poverty over 90%, and foreign reserves almost depleted. HIV/AIDS and malnutrition kill thousands every month. In the context of rapidly declining living standards, the government launched "Operation Murambatsvina" in 2005 to forcibly clear urban slums. Up to a third of the population is thought to have fled the country and remittances from the growing Diaspora have become the lifeline for many remaining. In September 2008 Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC) and Mugabe signed a power sharing agreement with Tsvangirai taking the place of Prime Minister. Relations between the 2 parties remain tense, with human rights violations against members of the MDC still being committed.

FACTS

- **Full name:** Republic of Zimbabwe
- **Population:** 13.3 million (UN 2007)
- **Capital:** Harare
- **Area:** 390,759 sq km (150,873 sq miles)
- **Internet domain:** .zw
- **International dialling code:** +263
- **Major religion:** Christianity, indigenous beliefs
- **Major languages:** English (official), Shona, Sindebele
- **HDI value*¹:** 151. Zimbabwe (0.513) [1. Iceland (0.968)] (2005)
- **Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)*²:** Zimbabwe (34.0) (2007)
- **Probability of not surviving past 40 (%):** 57.4 (highest in the world)
- **Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births):** 90 (UNICEF 2007)
- **HIV prevalence (% aged 15-49):** 15.3 (2007)
- **Life expectancy at birth (years) :** 43 (UNICEF 2007)



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Education

- **Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%):**
 - **143. Zimbabwe (52.4)** [1. Australia (113.0)] (2005)
- **Adult Literacy Rate: (% ages 15 and older): 91** (UNICEF 2007)

Economy and Trade

- **GDP per capita:** No. of people lived below the national poverty line. (PPP US\$):
 - **140. Zimbabwe (2,038)** [1. Luxembourg (60,228)] (2005)
- **GNI Per Capita:** **US \$340** (World Bank, 2005)
- **Gini Coefficient *³:** **26. Zimbabwe (50.1)** [126. Denmark (24.7)] (2007)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Zimbabwe dollar = 100 cents
- **Main exports:** Tobacco, cotton, agricultural products, gold, minerals
- **CO₂ emissions share of world total (%): 0.0 (2004)** [0.1 (1990)]

Water, sanitation and nutritional status

- **Population without access to an improved water source (%): 19** (UNICEF 2007)
- **Population using improved sanitation (%): 46 (2007)** [50 (1990)]
- **Population Undernourished (% of total population): 47 (2002-2004)** 45 [(1990-1992)]

Politics

- **Government:** MDC and Zanu PF – Government of National Unity
- **President:** Robert Mugabe
- **Year Women received right to vote:** **1919, 1957**
- **Internally displaced people (thousands, 2006): 570**



*¹ The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).

*² The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the HDI.

*³ The **Gini coefficient** is most prominently used as a measure of inequality of wealth distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, and a value of 100 absolute inequality.

*⁴ Rankings are out of a total of 177.