



THEMATIC PROTECTION BULLETIN CLOSING THE GAPS

Ensuring the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons post-conflict

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BACKGROUND

- Airstrikes were launched against a faction of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) by the Philippine Air Force (PAF) in the marshy areas of the municipalities of Datu Montawal, Pagalungan, Gen. SK Pendatun, and Sultan sa Barongis in the province of Maguindanao, as well as in the municipality of Pikit in the province of North Cotabato on 10 June 2018.
- This incident was part of an ongoing operation by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) against the BIFF faction led by Esmail Abubakar (aka Commander Bungos), whose group had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS).
- As of 19 June 2018, approximately **5,136 families (23,465 individuals)** were forced to flee from the municipalities of Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Sultan sa Barongis, General SK Pendatun and Pikit. This figure is expected to rise as military operations continue and the BIFF is anticipated to retaliate.
- In response, the local governments of affected municipalities immediately opened evacuation centers in several locations to cater to the humanitarian needs of the displaced population.
- Most of the displaced are staying with host families, while the rest have settled in designated evacuation sites, such as schools, gyms, and in other community structures.

CLOSING THE GAPS

In order to close the gaps, duty bearers have the responsibility to ensure that:

- Internally displaced persons are not forced, or otherwise pressured or coerced, either directly or indirectly, to return to their former homes, lands or places of habitual residence.
- The right of internally displaced persons to return voluntarily to their former homes, lands or places of habitual residence, in safety and dignity, is respected.
- Internally displaced persons should be provided with complete, objective, up-to-date, and accurate information, including on physical, material and legal safety issues in their current displacement locations and places of origin.
- Access to appropriate assistance is facilitated for IDPs, particularly in instances when displacement becomes protracted because security conditions do not yet allow for safe and voluntary return.
- Consistent monitoring of the condition of displaced persons is done in order to address safety and security concerns as they arise.
- Following safe and voluntary return, measures are taken to ensure that the safety of civilians is protected within areas where conflict may still be ongoing.

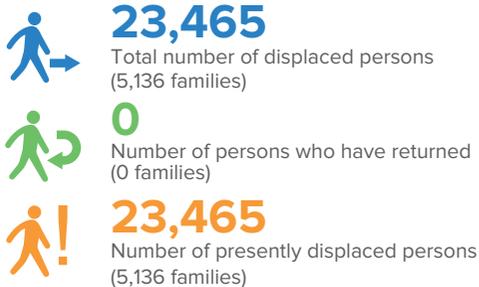
IN FOCUS: VOLUNTARY, SAFE AND DIGNIFIED RETURN OF DISPLACED PERSONS

- In international law and based on international standards, displaced persons have the right to return voluntarily to their former homes, lands or places of habitual residence, in safety and dignity. Voluntary return in safety and dignity must be based on a free, informed, individual choice. Displaced persons should be provided with complete, objective, up-to-date, and accurate information, including on physical, material and legal safety issues in places of origin. Displaced persons shall not be forced, or otherwise coerced, either directly or indirectly, to return to their former homes, lands or places of habitual residence. Displaced persons should be able to effectively pursue durable solutions to displacement other than return, if they so wish, without prejudicing their right to the restitution of their housing, land and property.
- While there officially remains a “no return of IDPs” status in affected communities due to continuous airstrikes, IDPs claim they were already advised by authorities as early as 17 June to return to their residences.
- IDPs have expressed uncertainty over the security situation of their home barangays and have opted not to return. They transferred instead to other temporary shelters.
- IDPs have voiced concerns that they do not feel safe returning to their places of origin. Airstrikes and mortar shelling continue to be conducted and their residences are located within the targeted barangays, or are located in neighbouring barangays.

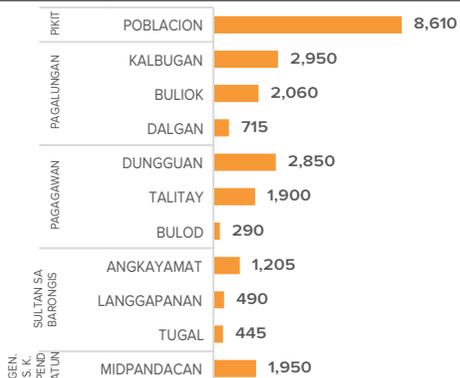


DISCLAIMER: The Thematic Protection Bulletin aims to provide a starting point for information and analysis that can help protection agencies, policy makers and other stakeholders concerning instances of forced displacement or solutions (repatriation, resettlement, integration). The number of people displaced / affected may differ from the number in need of humanitarian assistance. To the extent possible, the terminology used in the Bulletin reflects the *UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* and other sources of international law and practice. The information reported in the Thematic Protection Bulletin has been received from members of the Protection Cluster across Mindanao. Consequently, unreported cases of forced displacement and solutions are not reflected. Updates will be provided as and when more information is received from members. Although efforts are made to verify the data, the UNHCR Mindanao, Philippines takes no responsibility for the incompleteness or inaccuracy of the information. The information provided in this Thematic Protection Bulletin does not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR or any individual member of the Protection Cluster. Photos featuring children were taken with their consent.

KEY FIGURES



BREAKDOWN OF DISPLACED PERSONS PER HOST MUNICIPALITY



LEGEND



LOCATION MAP

