

The Mindanao Displacement Dashboard is a monthly publication of the Protection Cluster in Mindanao, Philippines, which is co-led by UNHCR with the Department of Social Welfare and Development. This publication aims to provide an overview of the protection environment of displacement incidents in Mindanao for each month. Displacement incidents were collected with the support of Protection Cluster members in Mindanao.

AFP vs ASG in Sulu and Basilan

In the island provinces of Sulu and Basilan, tens of thousands of people have been displaced due to ongoing armed confrontations between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

According to a report from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), as of 27 September, a total of 4,661 families (24,343 persons) have been displaced from 46 barangays in Sulu, including those who had fled their homes during earlier clashes. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) are staying with their relatives in the affected municipalities of Indanan, Maimbung, Panamao, Parang, and Patikul. An evacuation center has also been established in Barangay Latih, Patikul municipality.

Based on an initial assessment by the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao's Humanitarian Emergency Action and Response Team (ARMM-HEART), only makeshift shelters are available at the designated displacement sites. These lack protection from heat and rain, as well as sanitation and water supply facilities. However, most IDPs have sought refuge with host families.

The provincial government of Sulu – in coordination with local Disaster Response, Rehabilitation, and Management Councils (DRRMCs); DSWD offices at the provincial and municipal levels; and the Rural Health Unit of Sulu – is taking the lead in providing assistance to the affected families. The DSWD Region IX Field Office and DSWD-ARMM have augmented these efforts by distributing 5,000 family food packs, while ARMM-HEART provided an additional 3,150 family food packs.

Accessing detailed information on the protection situation in Sulu remains challenging for most humanitarian actors due to the security situation.

Meanwhile, in Basilan, three municipalities continue to be affected by clashes between the AFP and ASG. By September, the number of those displaced as a result of ongoing fighting had increased to 3,533 families (19,333 persons) who have sought shelter with their relatives in safer areas on the island. These include those displaced earlier in 2016. Findings from a DSWD assessment indicate that as of 27 September, 424 families (2,491 persons) are still staying in relatives' or friends' houses. The highest number of affected families were from Tipo-Tipo, followed by Ungkayan Pukan and Al-Barka municipalities.

In addition, 1,729 families (6,218 individuals) from the municipalities of Akbar, Hadji Mohammad Ajul, Sumisip, and Tuburan pre-emptively evacuated on 05 September upon the advice of the provincial government.

Based on information from the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office, following a "People's Day" organized by the provincial government, an undetermined number of IDPs from Barangays Baguindan and Silangkum in Tipo-Tipo municipality have returned to their homes.

During the latter activity, 1,400 families received food packs from the provincial government. The Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office conducted supplementary feeding, while the Department of Health provided medical assistance. Schoolchildren benefited from the distribution of school supplies through the DSWD-ARMM. ARMM-HEART also extended basic medical and humanitarian assistance during a field mission on the first week of September. Despite such initiatives, humanitarian needs arising from displacement continue to challenge the response capacities of State actors, particularly amidst security constraints.



Land dispute in Aleosan, North Cotabato

Tensions between private parties due to a land dispute led to the pre-emptive evacuation of an estimated 34 families (around 170 individuals) from Sitio Sulok, Dungguan, Aleosan, North Cotabato, and from the neighboring Sitio Bentad, in Barangay Baliki, Midsayap, North Cotabato, on 24 September. The Philippine National Police office in Aleosan municipality deployed personnel to the area. However, negotiation efforts between the parties failed, triggering a firefight on 26 September.

The week before fighting broke out, armed men reportedly established a temporary post within the vicinity of an elementary school in Dungguan, causing the suspension of classes.

According to field monitoring by protection partners, the IDPs returned to their homes two days after being displaced.

Over 2,500 displaced IPs in Tandag, Surigao del Sur return to their homes

After a year of displacement, 2,573 lumad (indigenous peoples or IPs) returned to their habitual residences in different municipalities in the province of Surigao del Sur, in Eastern Mindanao, on 03 September. The IPs were displaced due to paramilitary activities in their places of origin and consequent threats to their life and safety, and had been hosted at the Provincial Sports Complex in Tandag City, Surigao del Sur.

Their return was made possible after a series of consultations between stakeholders from the government, non-government organizations (NGOs), faith-based institutions and IDPs themselves (see August 2016 Displacement Dashboard). Agencies who participated in the assessment, ocular visit, and crafting of an inter-agency action plan committed to facilitate a safe and sustainable return, as well as to provide appropriate assistance to the returnees in rebuilding their lives and communities.

Close cooperation and support among all stakeholders resulted in a process that was exemplary in terms of observance of applicable international standards. A few days before the planned return, the military pulled out its troops from the areas where the IPs habitually resided prior to their displacement. The provincial government provided vehicles to help transport the IDPs back to their communities, while line agencies and NGOs distributed food packs, kitchen utensils, and hygiene kits. Based on the action plan, the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Health will continue the provision of food and medicines for four months, until December 2016. As per the action plan, the relevant government agencies, together with partner NGOs, would also initiate the provision of materials for the repair of houses and schools, as well as livelihood assistance and skills training. Monthly meetings will be held to monitor the implementation of the action plan.



Lumad returnees arriving at Kilometer 9, Barangay Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur.
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Process towards safe return for displaced IPs in Haran Compound, Davao City ongoing

On 23 September, 26 families (around 70 persons) from an indigenous peoples' community left Haran Compound, Davao City, where they had been hosted for over a year after fleeing their homes. This development, which followed a dialogue between IDP leaders and the municipal local government unit of Kitaotao, Bukidnon on 19 September, aims to pave the way for the IPs' return to their habitual residences in Barangay White Culaman, in Kitaotao. As of the latest information, these families remain in a transitional site in nearby Barangay Sangay, also in Kitaotao, until security conditions improve enough for their return to Barangay White Culaman to safely proceed.

Meanwhile, another IP group in Haran Compound, consisting of 36 families from Sitio Muling, Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte, are also seeking opportunities for return, provided that it can be undertaken in safety and dignity. However, a planned interagency ocular visit to Kapalong – originally scheduled on 13 September – failed to materialize due to security issues linked to persistent paramilitary presence in the IPs' area of origin. As of this report, the IPs from Kapalong remain in Haran Compound pending further discussions on their voluntary, safe, and sustainable return. Meanwhile, government line agencies – particularly the Department of Social Welfare and Development through its Region XII office – have expressed their commitment to support the returnees in meeting their basic needs for food and shelter during the recovery process upon return.

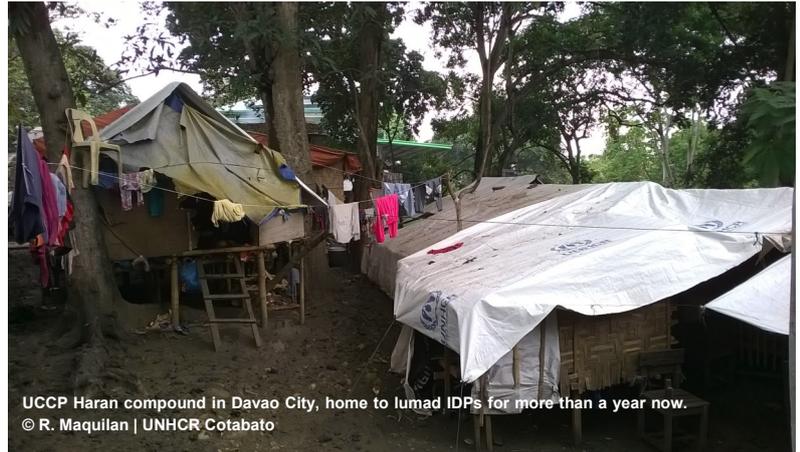
Nearly four years after Typhoon Pablo, many IDPs have yet to access durable solutions

A significant number of displaced families await the provision of permanent shelters and livelihood assistance through government programs, nearly four years since Typhoon Pablo (Bopha) struck Eastern Mindanao in December 2012.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), National Housing Authority (NHA), and local government units in Region XI are coordinating to implement a shelter assistance program for those whose homes were destroyed or damaged by the typhoon. A total of 44,668 housing units have been targeted for construction in four affected provinces – Compostela Valley, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, and Davao Oriental – and in Davao City. Of these, 36,162 have been funded; 30,483 are completed as of 19 September 2016, while 1,461 are still being built and construction of 4,218 has yet to start. These include both “on-site” projects, where the permanent housing units would be built on the locations where the IDPs habitually resided before being displaced, and “off-site” ones, where the units are being constructed in identified relocation areas.

Due to the delay in the construction of these houses, some IDPs have opted to relocate to other areas without receiving any State assistance. In some cases, beneficiaries are reporting their unwillingness to move into the units handed over to them. Their main expressed reason in this regard relates to concerns over the quality of completed houses, particularly in terms of quality of materials used, as well as lack of facilities for water supply, drainage, or electricity. Others report difficulty accessing their livelihood sources from the areas where they would be relocated. Mainly for these reasons, a number of housing units that have already been awarded remain unoccupied.

Meanwhile, the government agencies concerned continue to face challenges, particularly in identifying appropriate relocation sites and ensuring compliance with applicable standards, especially by private contractors and subcontractors.



UCCP Haran compound in Davao City, home to lumad IDPs for more than a year now. © R. Maquilan | UNHCR Cotabato

IDPs in Butig, Lanao del Sur face persistent protection concerns amidst AFP vs Maute operations

As military operations against the Maute Group continue in the municipality of Butig, Lanao del Sur, more than 2,100 people affected by earlier firefights remain displaced in various barangays and municipalities. A significant majority of the displaced originate from the barangays of Coloyan, Poctan, and Ragayan where sporadic artillery shelling continues to be reported as of 28 September. In the neighboring barangay of Sandab, airstrikes have also been reported on 17 September. Based on field monitoring by protection partners, people who had been previously displaced may have evacuated anew upon receiving information about potential escalation in armed encounters.

Most of the IDPs in prolonged displacement have sought refuge with their relatives, placing considerable strain on shared resources. A few displaced families are reportedly living in crowded conditions. IDPs have also expressed the need for food assistance, tarpaulins to serve as temporary shelters, as well as medical assistance, particularly for vulnerable individuals such as the elderly, women, and children.

As of this report, the security situation in Butig remains extremely volatile. Prolonged displacement has seriously affected the livelihoods of most IDPs, as sporadic fighting and possible presence of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) affects their ability to cultivate their land, particularly in Barangays Coloyan, Poctan, and Ragayan. However, some still take the risk of returning to their communities in the daytime to conduct farming activities. Damaged houses and community structures as a result of fighting early in 2016 also remain in need of repair. Reports of military troops being stationed in close proximity to a high school at the boundary of Butig and Lumbayague municipalities also continues to be a cause for concern as it puts pupils at risk.

As Zamboanga City marks third anniversary of conflict, IDPs continue to seek durable solutions

In line with the commemoration of the third anniversary of the 09 September 2013 armed conflict, 252 permanent shelters constructed under the Zamboanga City Roadmap to Reconstruction and Recovery (Z3R) were turned over to IDPs. In Barangay Sta. Catalina, which was devastated by fire in June 2016, around 300 vulnerable families benefited from free medical, agricultural, and social services through an initiative of the City Mayor's Office.

Meanwhile, the initial results of a profiling activity for home-based IDPs, conducted by the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) with technical support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were presented to stakeholders on 02 September. As of the end of September, the CSWDO and UNHCR are in the process of further validating these results. Aside from obtaining concrete information on the protection situation of home-based IDPs, the profiling seeks to further support government efforts to facilitate access to durable solutions for 2,436 families (13,754 persons) in 11 transitory sites, as well as 1,473 potential home-based IDP families who were affected by the siege.

