

With you

What's Inside

EMERGENCIES EXACERBATING THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic is happening against a complex backdrop of emergencies that are causing suffering in Mindanao and around the world

THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT: COVID-19 RESPONSE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Your support helped UNHCR augment government response efforts in containing the spread of COVID-19, ensuring protection and assistance for forcibly displaced populations, and building towards sustainable recovery

HEROES AT THE TIME OF COVID-19

Meet some of the Filipino donors, partners, and humanitarians who make our life-saving work possible amid the coronavirus pandemic



With disease prevention primarily relying on deeply established water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) practices, UNHCR with the support of donors and partners are providing WASH-related support to vulnerable communities like the Sama Bajaus in Brgy. Kasanyangan, Zamboanga City. Volunteers like Merhamna Taala are stepping up to help in rapid response efforts and health awareness initiatives that will benefit her community. © CHR IX/Shahribar Pajiran

Dear valued donor,

For six months now, COVID-19 has challenged fundamental aspects of our lives: the strength of our health systems, the resilience of our economies, and our ability to adapt and recover. The very social fabric that connected people before has been tested and in some cases torn apart.

What has kept us going through this time is your indomitable kindness towards the most vulnerable. While in lockdown and in spite of your own needs, many of you have reached out to us asking about how they're doing. You know that they have limited access to the basic services and health care that can protect them from this pandemic, and **your commitment to support them has never wavered.**

Thanks to you and our partners, we were able to mobilize our resources quickly to support the government-led response to this unprecedented crisis. In this newsletter, we report on **the impact of your commitment** and how far-reaching your donations have been during these past months. Thousands of forcibly displaced families in the most affected areas of Mindanao have been given emergency assistance and support, and **you have been their source of hope during this difficult time.**

Your generosity inspires us, our partners, and those we serve to be heroes to one another. We continued to stay and deliver because of your support. **With you by our side, we aim towards sustainable recovery** prioritizing public health, sanitation and WASH projects in this last quarter of 2020.

This pandemic and other emergencies have revealed many insecurities and inequalities, especially for those often neglected by society. **Through it all, you have chosen to spread kindness and joy, and we are deeply grateful for your support.**

Let us enter the last quarter of this year with courage. Together, we will emerge stronger.

Maraming salamat,

Your UNHCR Philippines family

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

Six months after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, it has spread across the globe with devastating speed, taking more than **900,000 lives** and infecting over **28 million individuals**.

Beyond the tragic costs to health and human life, the pandemic is also producing major social and economic disruptions that are deepening poverty, inequality, and vulnerability – especially among the **79.5 million forcibly displaced worldwide**. The impact on their mostly hand-to-mouth existence and on their hosts has been devastating.

For all its immense challenges, the COVID-19 crisis has also placed renewed emphasis on **the value of solidarity and cooperation in all aspects of response and recovery**. With your help, UNHCR is rapidly responding in **134 refugee-hosting countries** that are reporting local transmission. Our teams around the world are helping to further strengthen national health and sanitation systems, provide vital protection services and ramp up assistance for the most vulnerable. **We are in this together, and we will get through this together.**



Kaitlyn, 17, from the United States, received a special mention for her drawing called 'We are all in this together' which she submitted to UNHCR's 2020 Youth with Refugees Art Contest. © UNHCR/Kaitlyn Zhou

LEBANON EXPLOSIONS


The Beirut blasts that occurred in early August brought death and destruction, traumatizing a nation that was already so badly impacted by **COVID-19**, the **Syrian conflict**, and an ongoing **economic crisis**. Some **180** people were killed, **6,500** injured and up to **350,000** left homeless.

UNHCR launched the **Stand with Lebanon** appeal in support of a country that has been so generously receiving refugees for decades, and many of you have responded. Thank you for showing your solidarity. In the Philippines, we have raised over **Php 340,000** of additional support for those affected by the blast.

UNHCR is providing immediate support to over **100,000 people** who were severely affected. These efforts include:

 **4,100 shelter kits** given to the worst-affected households, benefiting **14,000 people**

 **Psychological first aid** **Medical & psychosocial support** together with immediate assistance interventions like food, health kits & legal aid to recover lost documents

 **800 additional beds** **100 additional ICU beds** including ventilators, advanced equipment, and medicine stocks as part of UNHCR's support to the national COVID-19 response

MINDANAO DISPLACEMENT

278,816
FORCIBLY DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS

Of the **278,816** individuals currently displaced in Mindanao, **123,508** remain displaced from the **earthquakes** that ripped through North Cotabato and Davao del Sur in 2019. **126,835** have not yet been able to return home after being displaced from the **Marawi conflict** in 2017. They remain in transitory sites, where access to basic services and health facilities is limited, making them extra vulnerable to COVID-19.

Amid the pandemic, **DISPLACEMENT IS STILL HAPPENING.**

73,760 individuals were displaced only this year due to **armed conflict, clan feuds, and violence**. This is compounded by COVID-19 as well as **flooding** and **calamities**. **With your help, we continue to stay and deliver for the forcibly displaced and ensure that their protection needs are met while in displacement.**

**Source: Protection Cluster Displacement Dashboard no. 72 (Aug 2020)*

THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT: COVID-19 RESPONSE IN THE PHILIPPINES

UNHCR Philippines, with the support of donors, in coordination with partners, and together with other United Nations agencies in the country, has mobilized rapidly and comprehensively to help the government respond to this unprecedented crisis – particularly in communities with refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced populations, and persons at risk of statelessness. They are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, and they cannot be left behind in the response.

PREPOSITIONING TO RESPOND TO A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Building on its experience in SARS and ebola outbreaks noting that the health crisis is a global challenge that must be addressed through solidarity and cooperation, in March UNHCR endeavoured to mobilize its resources to effectively combat the public health emergency urging governments and partners that the most vulnerable – including **refugees, asylum seekers, stateless** and the **internally displaced** – should be able to **access health facilities and services in a non-discriminatory manner**.

UNHCR has followed the guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and identified a number of **prevention** and **response** activities in displacement situations that include:

Advocacy

Advocating for the **inclusion** of persons of concern in the calculation of stockpile needs of medicines, personal protective equipment, ancillary pharmaceuticals and supplies, and laboratory diagnostics

Monitoring

Monitoring for **restrictions** on freedom of movement and/or refoulement based on **real or perceived fears** of coronavirus transmission

Mapping out the persons of concern and their needs

Assessing **health partner capacity** to respond in the event of an outbreak in settlements

Communication

Helping adapt communication materials to suit local **linguistic** and **cultural** needs

RAPID RESPONSE

Together with other UN agencies in the Philippines, UNHCR augmented government response efforts in containing the spread of the pandemic and decreasing morbidity and mortality, as well as ensuring protection and assistance for forcibly displaced populations.

Life-saving Assistance

Providing **core relief items, hygiene kits, and personal protective equipment** to vulnerable communities and to support duty bearers in their response

Ensuring the continuity of **direct assistance** to refugees and asylum seekers amid the pandemic

Community Level Health Awareness

Conducting awareness raising sessions and distributing localized COVID-19 information materials focusing on **hygiene, respiratory symptoms and signs, referral mechanisms, infection prevention information**

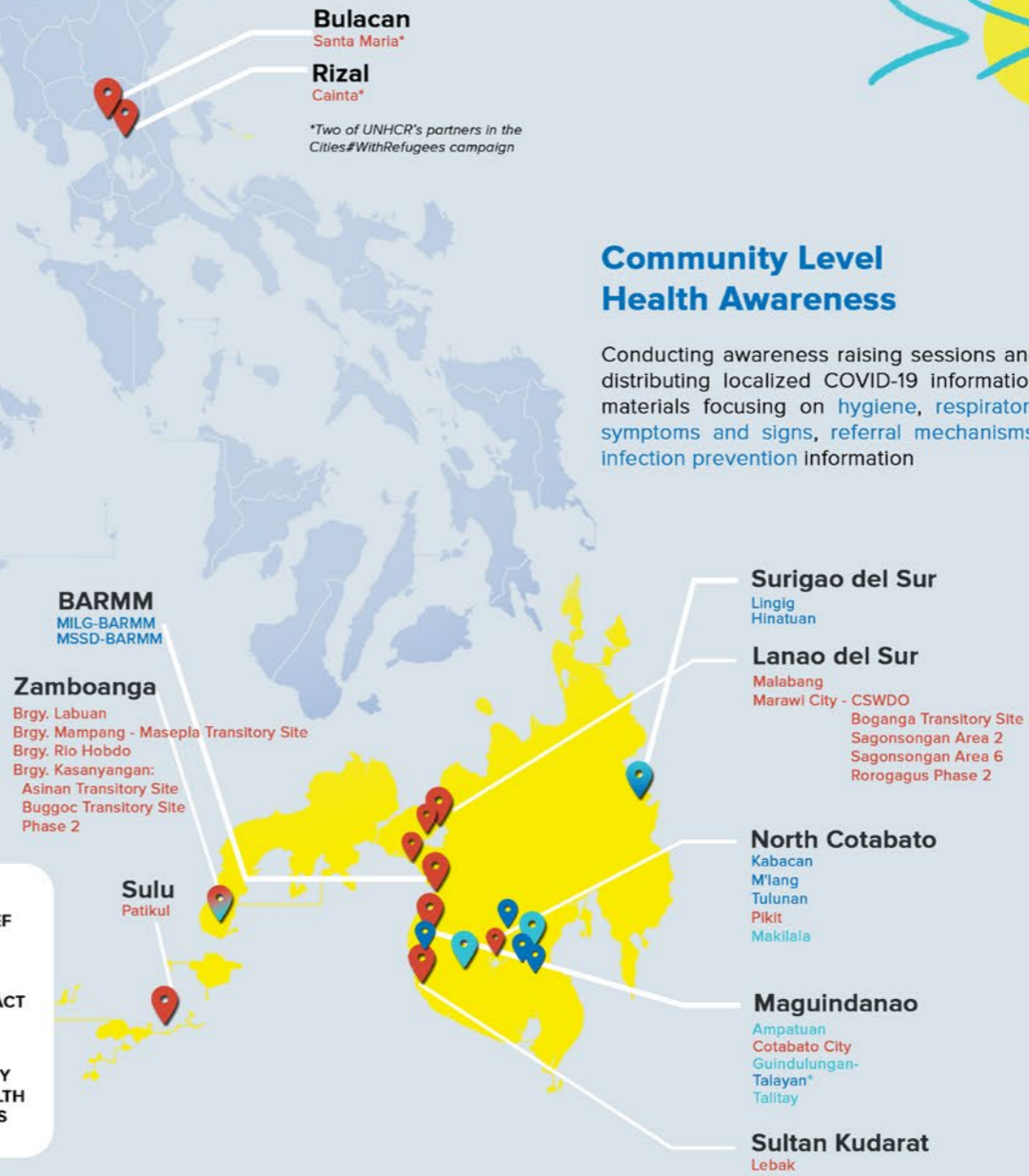
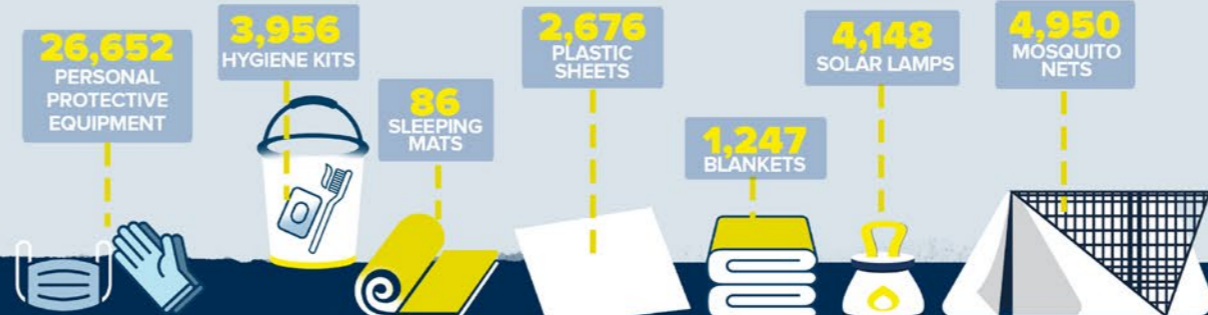
With you, we have reached

36,158
INDIVIDUALS WITH
CORE RELIEF ITEMS

29,359
INDIVIDUALS WITH
HEALTH AWARENESS

25,498
INDIVIDUALS WITH
QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS
(MORE TO COME FOR Q4 2020)

- CORE RELIEF ITEMS
- QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS
- COMMUNITY LEVEL HEALTH AWARENESS



SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY

UNHCR joins the government and other humanitarian partners in helping ensure that the people of the Philippines can emerge stronger and be better prepared to withstand future emergencies.

Information Management

UNHCR Philippines has a functional cooperation with government agencies in instituting a **systematic information management & reporting mechanism** that maps displacement incidences to gauge the extent of protection provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Information management has become a useful tool in **providing targeted assistance** as information is derived from **evidence-based** needs, gaps, as well as **displacement trends** and analysis gathered by a strong Protection Cluster network.



Capacity Building

UNHCR is strengthening the information management capacity of government partners to ensure continuity in **refugee status determination procedures, protection monitoring, case management, as well as reporting and mitigating potential protection risks** for displaced people amid the public health emergency.

Quick Impact Projects

UNHCR is **mainstreaming and integrating** the impact of COVID-19 into the planning and design of quick impact projects, which promote **community empowerment, help foster peaceful co-existence, and strengthen resilience** of forcibly displaced populations.



Thank you!
Php 1.5M
RAISED FROM DONORS OF UNHCR PHILIPPINES TO ENSURE PROTECTION AND CRITICAL AID FOR THE FORCIBLY DISPLACED

Help us reach
23,977
MORE INDIVIDUALS WITH QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS IN THE NEXT 3 MONTHS, TO HELP THEM RECOVER & BUILD BETTER FUTURES

IN PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION WITH :
ACCORD • ACTED • BARMM - READI, MILG & MSSD • CFSI • CHR IX • DFAT • DSWD Regions 9, 10, 11, 12 & CARAGA • IRDT • KI • MMI • TFBM • TKI
Local Government Units including their CSWDO / MSWDO and MDRRMO, and other affiliated NGOs

HEROES AT THE TIME OF COVID-19

UNHCR Philippines continues to stay and deliver for the most vulnerable, but this would not be possible without the dedication of donors, partners, community volunteers, and tireless humanitarians who are working together to ensure that no one is left behind. They are the real-life heroes in the fight against the coronavirus.

Merhamna Taala belongs to the Sama Bajau tribe, an indigenous group mostly found in Mindanao. While recognized by the Philippine Government as Filipinos, the Sama Bajaus face the risk of becoming stateless due to their frequent border-crossing and generations of non-registration of birth. The vulnerability of conditions of Sama Bajaus in high-density settlements also puts them at great risk during the pandemic.



MERHAMNA TAALA

Community Volunteer

“As a volunteer, I want to prove that **anyone could help** without expecting something in return.”

On a regular day, Merhamna can be seen in her classroom teaching toddlers how to read, write, identify colors, and feeding them with a nutritious meal before they go home. After her class, she attends to the needs of the toddlers’ parents who are mostly illiterate: helping them with their queries on how to have access to government services such as birth registration, information on school admission processes, and the social amelioration program.

Merhamna was one of the volunteers who helped in the implementation of the pilot birth registration project for the Sama Bajaus in September 2019, but her dedication for serving her community continues on. In March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, UNHCR helped translate COVID-19 related communication

materials to *Sinama*, the local language of Sama Bajaus. Merhamna proactively helped in reproducing copies and posted it in the community for people to have access to it.

With disease prevention primarily relying on deeply established water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) practices, UNHCR and partners are working on the provision of WASH-related support to vulnerable communities. Recently, Merhamna volunteered to distribute hygiene kits to 300 Sama Bajaus in her community, which UNHCR provided to the Zamboanga City local government unit upon its request. She also helped with community level health awareness by sharing prevention tips like the importance of wearing a face mask, physical distancing and proper handwashing.

FRANCIS PANGANIBAN

Partner

“I am privileged to fulfill my responsibilities and do everything I can **for this country**. If I faltered in the year of COVID, who else would be willing to **take a risk** on this responsibility?”

Francis has been a social worker with UNHCR partner CFSI (Community and Family Services International) for five years now. Through the Urban Refugee Project (URP), UNHCR and CFSI conduct regular protection monitoring and provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in the Philippines. During the pandemic, the URP has provided additional support through regular health monitoring, the sharing of risk communication materials, and the provision of emergency assistance.

There have been many challenges due to COVID-19, but Francis continues to persevere. “**We are challenged to extend our social services to our persons of concern as mobility of our people is hampered,**” Francis said. Due to

lockdown measures, CFSI has since shifted to online / digital forms of communicating with vulnerable communities.

Francis, along with his colleagues at CFSI, have simply become more creative and more persistent in providing their services. They constantly stay in touch and ensure that each individual’s needs are met. They have partnered with remittance centers so that refugees and asylum seekers will still be able to receive emergency cash assistance while also minimizing the risks from face-to-face contact. They have also utilized online resources for the continuing education of persons of concern and their families.



Francis Panganiban from UNHCR’s partner organization Community and Family Services International (CFSI) is working on the frontlines to ensure that refugees & asylum seekers are kept informed and have access to health services and social aid and livelihood programs. He has served this vulnerable population for years as part of the Urban Refugee Project, but the ongoing pandemic has now introduced new challenges.

YSABEL GATMAITAN

Donor

“I believe it is a deposit I am making for the betterment of the **next generation’s future.**”

Ysabel Gatmaitan finds joy in her family and her work. As much as possible, she tries to empathize with what others are going through. “**Everyone is in a different situation. People have to remember tolerance, perseverance, and to make oneself useful.**”

In one of her travels, Ysabel visited Barcelona’s Maritime Museum, where she chanced upon an art installation of actual rubber boats and photos of Syrian refugees. It was then that she was able to picture what it’s like to escape from war, leave everything behind, and flee the home you know in order to survive.

“**Sometimes seeing suffering daily makes one numb; or corruption makes one not want to help others,**” Ysabel shares. But we all have a part to play, and for Ysabel, she is doing what she can to help those who need it most by

giving to UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency.

Since 2015, Ysabel has been one of UNHCR’s most generous supporters. She has helped those affected by the Syrian refugee crisis, Rohingya emergency, Marawi conflict, and Lebanon explosions, among many others. When the COVID-19 pandemic happened and UNHCR appealed for support, she responded to the call without hesitation.

Ysabel sees UNHCR as *mapagkakatiwalaan* (trustworthy), *masinop* (prudent) & *maaasahan* (reliable), and she hopes it will always be so. “**Since I trust UNHCR, I am hoping that the help I send goes to the right places, since it means I will give less to my children.**” But it is also by giving that she hopes to contribute to making the world a better place and build a better future for the next generation.



Ysabel Gatmaitan is a Filipino citizen, wife, mother of three children, and one of UNHCR’s most loyal donors. Her committed support through the years has made it possible for UNHCR to respond to multiple emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and deliver immediate life-saving assistance to those who need it the most.

AISAH DISOMA

Staff

“I myself was internally displaced due to the Marawi Siege. It makes me strive hard to initiate what is expected of me because **I know what the IDPs* are experiencing.**”

*Internally displaced persons

The coronavirus adds complexity to Aisah’s work of staying and delivering for the forcibly displaced. Over the past few months, Aisah and other UNHCR field colleagues have been busy on ground, giving much-needed assistance and protection to the most vulnerable.

“**Responding to emergencies like COVID-19 is not easy. As a humanitarian, you have to ask yourself which is important, your mission to serve or your health. But, that did not stop me.**” Aisah has to be extra careful not only for her own health but more importantly for the health and protection of the most vulnerable. “**At this time of pandemic where completing the work is challenging and life-threatening, and we need to shift to different work modalities to continue serve our persons of**

concern, endurance and perseverance are a must.”

Despite the challenges, Aisah knows she must stay resilient, and she gets inspiration from the forcibly displaced families who remain positive despite the challenges they go through. For Aisah, whether or not there is a pandemic, the work remains and her commitment is the same.

“**Working together, we can alleviate the sufferings internally displaced persons (IDPs) are encountering or even eliminate them. UNHCR is committed to continue its protection activities for IDPs, and I am committed to stay and deliver for these people.**”






UNHCR Field Protection Associate Aisah Disoma has been in protection work for more than a decade. Having experienced being internally displaced due to the Marawi conflict in 2017, she knows that now more than ever, forcibly displaced persons in Mindanao need our help as they face various challenges in security, sanitation, livelihood, and privacy on top of health concerns brought by COVID-19.



© UNHCR/ Lyka Gonzalez

As we move from rapid response to sustainable recovery, your committed support ensures that more **forcibly displaced families in Mindanao** are better prepared and equipped to withstand future emergencies. In the next few months, the impact of **COVID-19** will be integrated into the design and implementation of quick impact projects, prioritizing **water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities**.

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