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

Normini Adilao and her family have been displaced since the Marawi conflict in May 2017, and are currently staying in Boganga Transitory Site. With your support, UNHCR recently distributed hygiene kits to the families in Boganga, and is building a water facility to help address health and sanitation concerns as well as promote community empowerment and peaceful co-existence. © UNHCR/Jalanie Pangalian
Message from UNHCR Philippines

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.

Maraling salamat,

Your UNHCR Philippines family
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 underscored its resolve 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 vulnerable populations of concern in the creation of lockdowns that meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups, promote protection of human rights, reintegration, and social inclusion.
- **Monitoring**
  - Monitoring the impact on health of movements, social restrictions, and economic impacts on those living in refugee camps and settlements.
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- **Communication**
  - Helping to disseminate information to prevent panic and cultural norms.

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.

Sustainable Recovery

UNHCR joined 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 technical assistance partnership with government agencies in creating a nationwide information management infrastructure that maps displacement indicators to guide the scale of programs provided to forcibly displaced persons (IDPs).

Capacity Building

UNHCR is strengthening the information management capacity of government partners to ensure continual and robust data collection, community monitoring, case management, and information sharing through the Philippine Government’s national risk management, tracking, and response platform. This helped link people directly to the proper authorities.

Quick Impact Projects

UNHCR Philippines is carrying out emergency response projects to ensure that communities can build back stronger after the pandemic. These projects include a wide range of interventions, such as providing emergency assistance, livelihood support, and psychosocial support.

Thanks to your generous support, we have reached:

- **36,158** individuals with core relief items
- **29,359** individuals with health awareness
- **25,498** individuals with quick impact projects

**With you, we have reached**

Thank you! Php 1.5M Raised from donors of UNHCR Philippines to ensure protection and critical aid for forcibly displaced persons.

In partnership and coordination with:

- ACCORD
- ACTED
- BARMM
- RDA
- MLG
- MSSD
- CPSI
- CHR IX
- DFAT
- CSWD Regions 9, 10, 11, 12 & CARAGA
- BRD T
- KI
- MMI
- TFRM
- TKI
- Local Government Units including their CSWDs / MSWDs and MORIMRO, and other affiliated NGOs

24,027 Personal protective equipment
3,598 Hand sanitizer
2,075 Plastic sheets
1,416 Solar lamps
4,188 Mosquito nets
3,874 Hygiene kits
1,977 Sanitizers
4,898 Laundry bags

Help us reach: 23,977 more individuals with quick impact projects in the next 3 months, to help them recover & build better futures.
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
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 Samal 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 Sama, the local language of Samal 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, and 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 Samal Bajaus in her community, which UNHCR provided to the Zamboanga City local government under 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 updating, sharing of risk communication materials, and the provision of emergency assistance.

There have been many challenges due to the pandemic, 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, has 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 also use online resources for the continuous education of persons of concern and their families.

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. Leaving everything behind, and flee the home she knows in order to survive.

“Sometimes seeing suffering daily makes one numb; or corruption makes one 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 magpakailanman (trustworthy), masipag (prudent) and masasamahan (helpful), and she hopes it will always be so.

“Since I trust UNHCR, I am hoping that the help I give them is not a right place, 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.

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.”

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 humanitarians, 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 of our beneficiaries, the very people she has committed her life to.

“During this period of pandemic where completing the work is challenging and life-threatening, 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 alleviates them. UNHCR is committed to continue its protection activities for IDPs, and I am committed to stay and deliver for these people.”
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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