



Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence - The Philippines

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Housing challenges in urban areas

Millions of people are displaced each year in the Philippines, mainly as a result of disasters brought on by natural hazards, but also as a result of conflict and violence. Displacement tends to be short-term and localised. IDPs seek refuge with host families or in government camps before returning home when conditions allow.

Return may not always be possible, however, either because of insecurity or the loss of housing and livelihoods. IDPs who try to integrate locally or settle elsewhere, including in urban areas, often face significant challenges because of lack of tenure security and insecure environments. National authorities' lack of political will and engagement, particularly when IDPs belong to marginalised ethnic or religious minorities, is often behind such challenges.

The extent of protracted displacement is not known, but available data suggests that half of the 461,000 people displaced by conflict and disasters as of the end of 2014 had fled their homes more than a year before.^[287] This includes 31,000 IDPs in Zamboanga city on Mindanao, who have been living in displacement for 14 months.

In September 2013, three weeks of fighting between the government and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front destroyed around 10,000 homes and led to the displacement of 120,000 people within the city.^[289] The majority of the city's IDPs returned home in the weeks and months after the conflict, but many have been unable to do so. As of early 2015, around 20,000 were still living in camps, including transit sites to which many were forced to move during 2014, and 11,000 were living in host communities.^[290] Most camps and transit sites do not meet minimum standards in terms of shelter or access to food, water, sanitation and healthcare.^[291]

The main obstacles to their return are government restrictions, including "nobuild zones" declared in Muslim-majority coastal areas where many IDPs had their homes, and the slow pace of reconstruction. Fewer than 200 of the 7,800 permanent homes earmarked for reconstruction had been completed a year after the conflict ended.^[292]

Tenure insecurity is also a major factor preventing the return of the remaining IDPs. The majority owned their homes, but not the land on which they were constructed.^[293] The government has prioritised landowners for return and housing assistance, leaving others to wait. Some have been promised return once reconstruction is complete or relocation outside the city, but most have no information on when this might happen.

The fact that eligibility criteria for housing assistance had not been formalised as of early 2015, and that new "temporary" transit sites were still being constructed, have added to the confusion and scepticism of many IDPs, who fear their temporary stay may become a permanent one.

Others are at risk of being completely excluded from assistance, because the government considers them "illegitimate" IDPs on the basis of a tenure survey which purported to reveal that many had come to Zamboanga after the conflict.^[294] Assessments by international aid agencies, however, showed the vast majority had been living there for more than five years.^[295]

Despite its genuine efforts to help Zamboanga's IDPs, the city government has so far failed to take adequate measures to ensure the most vulnerable, particularly those with poor tenure security, are provided with long-term recovery assistance. The absence of an early recovery strategy following the end of the humanitarian phase in August 2014 has left many at risk of entrenched poverty, vulnerability and protracted displacement.

Poor donor response to the Zamboanga action plan in 2014, particularly its early recovery component, and limited engagement from the development sector have seriously hampered the international community's capacity to respond. The humanitarian country team adopted a durable solutions strategy in October 2014, raising hope that more attention will be paid to long-term solutions, particularly in terms of the most vulnerable IDPs' right to adequate housing.

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²⁸⁸. Office of Civil Defence, *Zamboanga Post-Conflict Needs Assessment*, 2 December 2013

²⁸⁹. IDMC interviews in Zamboanga, January 2015

²⁹⁰. OCHA, *Zamboanga Humanitarian Snapshot*, 30 January 2015, available at: <http://goo.gl/mGkz0r>; UNHCR, *Home-based IDP profiling*, Final analysis December 2014

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²⁹³. UNHCR, *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Profiling, Initial Results and Analysis*, June 2014

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