

ZAMBOANGA CITY

FIVE YEARS AFTER THE SIEGE



*A family displaced by the Zamboanga conflict receives core relief items.
Photo: UNHCR/K. Eleazar*

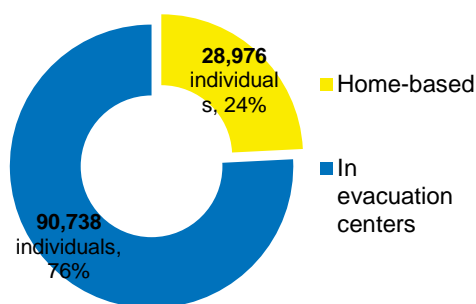
Background

Fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) erupted on 09 September 2013. The conflict affected sixteen (16) barangays in Zamboanga City, including the coastal barangays of Rio Hondo, Mariki, Sta. Catalina, and Sta. Barbara. Many houses were burned, hundreds of civilians were held captive, and thousands were displaced from their homes. The conflict further spread and caused displacement in the island provinces of Basilan and Sulu.

On 25 September 2013, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (URHC) Luiza Carvalho released a statement on behalf of the UN, emphasizing the seriousness of the situation and the growing needs of the persons of concern.

On 01 October 2013, the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (CDRRMC) also requested the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) to recommend to the president that Zamboanga City be declared under a state of calamity on the basis of a humanitarian crisis.

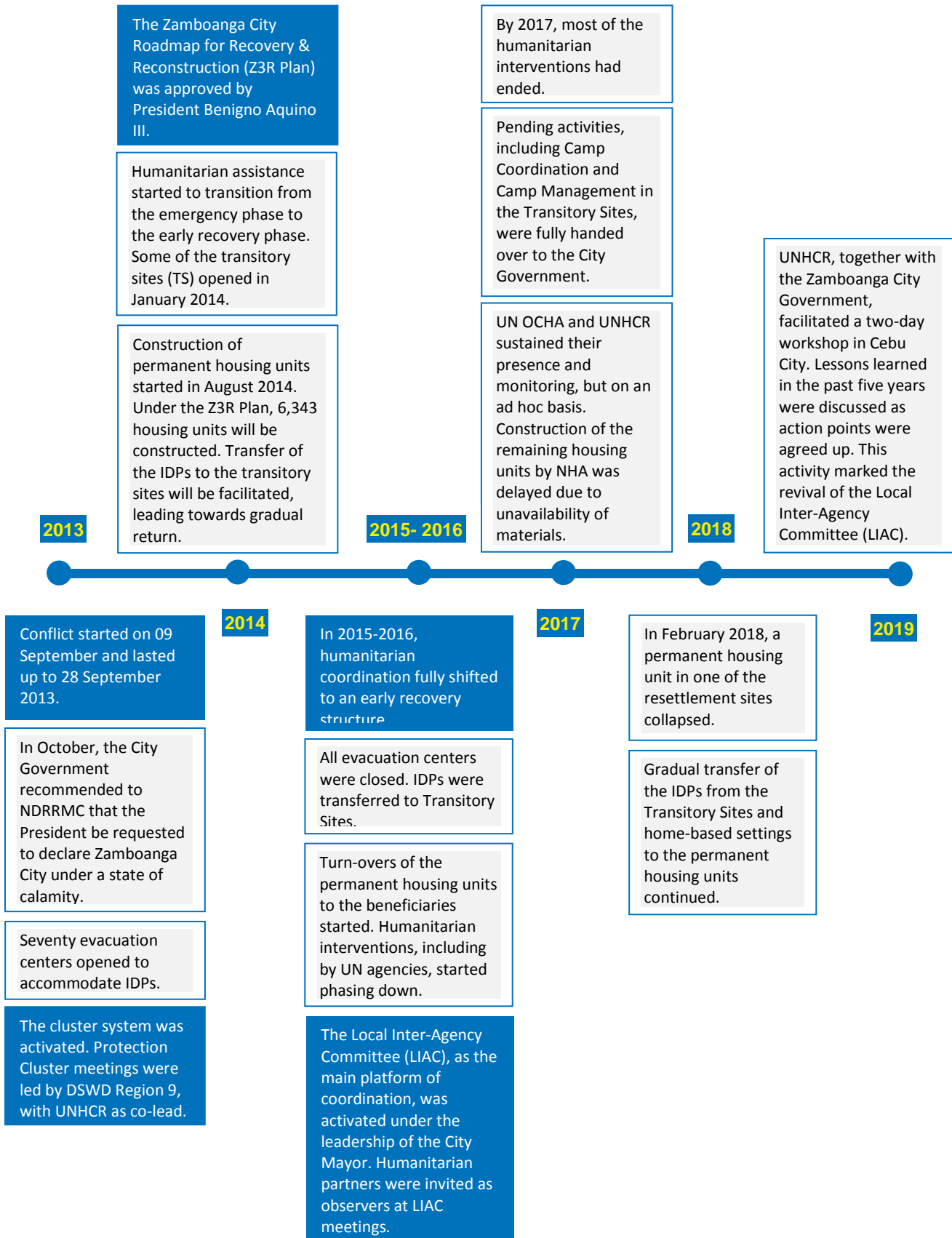
Peak displacement figures in 2013



At the onset of the crisis, a total of **119,714 individuals (23,794 families)** were displaced. Of this total, **28,976 individuals (5,881 families)** took temporary shelter with their relatives or relatives – locally referred to as “home-based IDPs. Another **90,738 individuals (17,913 individuals)** sought refuge in seventy (70) evacuation centers in different locations in the city.

With the establishment of an Operations Center by the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC) of Region IX and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao – Humanitarian Emergency Action and Response Team (ARMM-HEART), local NGOs and UN Agencies stationed themselves in Zamboanga City to complement the humanitarian response work led by government agencies. UN Agencies established field units at Garden Orchid Hotel to effectively funnel humanitarian assistance into the city and its displaced population.

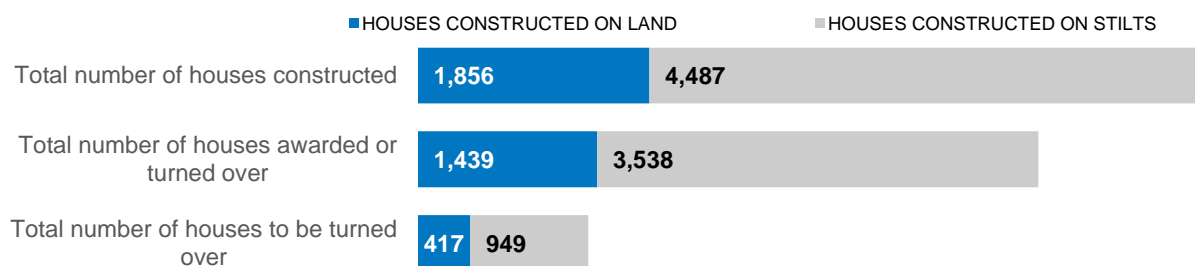
Timeline of Events



Displacement demographics

Home-based IDPs (peak of displacement)	28,976 individuals (5,881 families)
IDPs in evacuation centers (peak of displacement)	90,738 individuals (17,913 families)
Peak number of evacuation centers	70
Largest number of IDPs in a single evacuation center	25,304 individuals in Joaquin F. Enriquez Memorial Sports Complex

Status of permanent housing projects constructed under the Zamboanga Roadmap to Recovery and Reconstruction (Z3R)



***695 housing units are due to be awarded to the remaining IDPs, while construction of 693 units is still ongoing.**



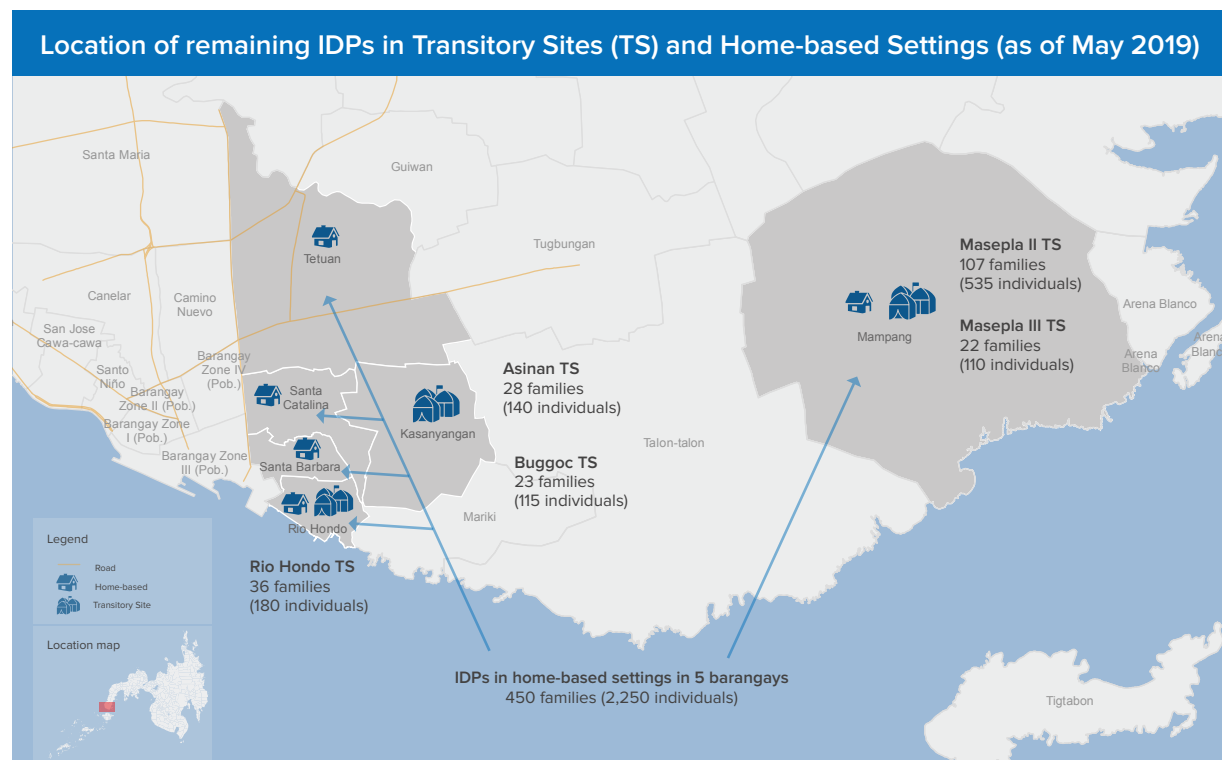
At the Sta. Catalina transitory site, these men sell fish for a living. Photo: UNHCR

Current situation of IDPs in Zamboanga City

More than five years after the Zamboanga siege, **1,080 persons (216 families)** remain in **five (5) transitory sites (TS)** out of the 119,714 persons (23,794 families) displaced at the onset of the conflict. **2,250 persons (or 450 families)** are being hosted by their friends and relatives as of May 2019.

Those in the TS are living in difficult conditions due to the old, if not damaged, bunkhouses in Buggoc, Rio Hondo, Kasanyangan, and Mampang TS. Aside from **dilapidated bunkhouses and boardwalks**, IDPs continue to face other protection issues such as **poor sanitation & hygiene, safety & security risks**, and **limited access to educational and livelihood opportunities**. Women, children, and persons with specific needs (PWSN) are particularly vulnerable.

For both **“families with tagging”¹** and **“untagged families,”** attainment of durable solutions has been hampered by recurring discussions on pending issues, as well as new concerns that have recently emerged (such as the collapse of a permanent housing unit, reported unlawful sales of awarded units by some beneficiaries, and alleged unauthorized/illegal occupancy of awarded units by parties other than the proper recipients) that have yet to be resolved.



¹ *Families with Tagging* – The “tagging” census or verification survey conducted by the City Government was used as primary basis in the identification of beneficiaries of permanent housing units to be awarded under the Zamboanga Roadmap to Recovery and Reconstruction (Z3R). The Z3R Code of Policies defined criteria for the “tagging” based on house/land ownership, in addition to those who were sharers or renters prior to displacement. Only “tagged” families are considered legitimate IDPs who are entitled to permanent housing assistance.

Protection issues affecting IDPs in transitory sites

Shelter

- More than 1,080 persons (216 families) continue to dwell in dilapidated and congested temporary shelters that have already broken down after five (5) years of occupancy. Most of the walls and roofing are damaged. During rainy days, rainwater leaks through the bunkhouses.
- Of the total number of IDPs remaining in the TS, 220 persons (44 families) are **with tagging** and are currently awaiting transfer to the permanent housing units that would be provided to them. Meanwhile, durable solutions for 945 persons (189 families) categorized as “untagged” remains uncertain. Majority of the untagged families are presently staying in Mampang TS.
- Some sixty-four (64) units intended for the Zamboanga siege beneficiaries were given instead to survivors of a fire incident in Sitio Asinan, Brgy. Kasanyangan, Zamboanga City in 2018. According to the IDPs, no prior consultations were carried out with the beneficiaries/awardees of the housing units.
- Some of the housing units constructed by the National Housing Authority (NHA) were reported to be substandard in terms of the quality of materials used. Due to the delay in completing the projects and awarding these units to beneficiaries, most of the walls and roofing have been further damaged. Some of the materials were also allegedly stolen by unknown individuals.
- Forty-two (42) housing units intended for identified beneficiaries/awardees were allegedly occupied (illegally) by other IDPs.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)

- Most of the WASH actors ended their interventions in December 2017. The water rations across the transitory sites also stopped in the same year. The displaced families rely on buying water from private individuals at a high price, which is not sufficient for the needs of each household. Many families have resorted to using water from the ocean and other local water sources for most of their household needs.
- Due to insufficient water supply, proper hygiene and sanitation are no longer practiced, especially among children and youth. Parents and guardians prefer to use the available water for drinking and cooking; this encourages children to clean utensils or even prepare food using salt water. Most of the children are also using the sea as a bathing area, resulting in skin diseases.
- The water selling and distribution points are open and uncovered, exposing pregnant women, elderly individuals, and children to the heat of the sun.
- Most of the latrines and bathing areas in the remaining TS are no longer functioning, and are either damaged or clogged. Persons with specific needs (PWSN), as well as those with respiratory illnesses or other vulnerabilities, usually go to neighboring facilities like schools to use the latrines there. In Mampang TS, IDPs have resorted to open defecation along the shoreline and in the ocean water surrounding their temporary dwellings.

Health

- Many IDPs are from Sama-Badjao tribe, for whom it is not customary to visit health centers or hospitals. They still depend on traditional healers, locally known as *panday*. In case of minor sickness, they rely on self-care and self-medication, either using synthetic medicines or herbal remedies.
- Pregnant women are rarely brought to birthing stations, and are instead assisted by traditional therapists or *hilot*. In Mampang TS, the nearest health station is five (5) kilometers away from the site.

Camp Coordination and Management

- After the International Organization for Migration (IOM) closed its operations in Zamboanga in December 2016, management of the remaining transitory sites (TS) was turned over to the CSWDO. In March 2017, the contracts of all camp managers who were assigned to the TS ended. Currently, all complaints are discussed only with IDP leaders and/or former peacekeepers. Thus, most issues remain unaddressed. Except for Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams (BPAT) in some locations, Protection actors are not present in any of the TS. Monitoring is presently being done on an ad hoc basis by humanitarian actors.
- Most of the boardwalks in Buggoc, Kasanyangan, and Mampang TS are damaged. This exposes IDPs living in these sites to risks of falling, especially children, elderly persons, and pregnant women. According to a female respondent, at least five (5) children fall or suffer accidents daily while crossing the boardwalks. A former Barangay Peacekeeper also cited that in the month of September 2018 alone, 30 persons fell through cracks/weak spots. A recent incident involved an adult woman whose face crashed into a piece of wood, resulting in severe bleeding.
- Because of the lack of Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team (BPAT) presence in most of the TS, IDPs staying there have apprehensions about their security. Young women, in particular, expressed fear about going out due to the presence of alleged drug pushers and/or users and other criminal elements within the TS. Allegedly, some minors have been observed participating in illegal drug-related activities. The presence of gangs has also been reported: six (6) groups are said to be active within the areas of Buggoc and Kasanyangan, recruiting minors and initiating riots.
- Poor lighting due to lack of electricity in Buggoc and Mampang TS has triggered concerns particularly among women, who feel that their safety at night is compromised and that this makes them more vulnerable to GBV incidents. IDPs living in these TS are dependent on manual/gasoline lamps, while some families bought solar lights. The pathways also do not have lighting, which limits their freedom of movement, especially for women and children. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) distributed some solar lamps to some of the IDPs in December 2018.

Protection issues affecting IDPs in home-based settings

Shelter

- The result of the IDP Profiling conducted by UNHCR and CSWDO in December 2016 affirmed that 7,365 persons (1,473 families) continue to stay with their relatives or friends in the 12 barangays within Zamboanga City. Of this total number, 5,640 persons (1,128 families) are “tagged” and 1,725 persons (345 families) are “untagged”. As of May 2019, more than 150 home-based IDPs are still in need of durable solutions.
- By the end of 2017, more than 4,000 persons (over 800 families with tagging) were included among the permanent housing beneficiaries, while the “untagged” families were assisted by other local partners through their shelter and livelihood projects. These projects were turned over and ended in the same year.
- More than 2,250 persons (450 families) with tagging are still staying with their relatives and friends. Permanent housing units have not yet been awarded to them due to lack of basic facilities, especially water and electricity, in the constructed houses. Some of the host families have already raised concerns about scarcity of resources due to the prolonged stay of the IDPs since September 2013.
- Following a directive from President Duterte, in July 2018, some of the housing units intended for IDPs affected by the Zamboanga siege were given to around sixty (60) households that were affected by a fire incident in one of the villages of Zamboanga City.
- The living space within the housing units is not sufficient to accommodate a large number of inhabitants (and are below minimum standards, based on SPHERE guidelines). In the years since they were displaced, some families has had an increase in family members. Those who were young adults during the crisis have started their own families by now, but they are not entitled to receive separate housing units because they were originally recorded as dependents in their families.

Livelihood

- Of the 7,365 home-based IDPs (1,473 families) who participated in Phase 3 of the IDP Profiling in December 2016, more than 2,250 persons (450 families) are still living with their friends or relatives. Most have limited access to livelihood. While most are engaged in various income-generating activities, what they earn is usually not enough to defray their daily costs of living. They need further livelihood support to reinforce their self-reliance.

Humanitarian assistance

- The gradual phasing down of all humanitarian interventions beginning in 2015 left most of the home-based IDPs with unequal/limited access to food and non-food assistance. The last food distribution was in 2014, while non-food items were last received in 2015. Most home-based IDPs rely on small income-generating activities and/or on the support given by host families or

relatives, which has weakened relationships between the home-based IDPs and the host families due to years of accommodation and resource sharing, which places an extended burden on the hosts.

Education

- In Mampang and Buggoc TS, undetermined numbers of children aged 6 years old and below were not able to attend school. There is only one (1) functioning primary school in the transitory sites, and it can only accommodate a limited number of students.
- Only 2 out of 10 children aged 7-18 years were attending school due to lack of financial means. Some preferred to support the head of the family in fishing and/or to engage in labor to supplement the family's income. Secondary schools are approximately 3-4 km. away from some transitory sites, and the daily cost to attend classes, including transportation and other expenses, is beyond the family's capacity.

Protection issues affecting awardees of permanent housing units

- Some materials used in the construction of housing units, under projects managed by the NHA, were found to be of substandard quality. Residents have expressed fear and concern after one housing unit collapsed in February 2018.
- The size of the housing units is also inadequate. Privacy is limited, and the space is congested especially for families with a large number of dependents.
- The housing units in Valle Vista Phase 3 have no basic facilities such as electricity and WASH facilities, resulting in poor sanitation at the site. Residents are no longer practicing proper solid waste management.
- At Valle Vista resettlement site in Brgy. Kasanyangan, some portions of the boardwalks are damaged, exposing children, women and elders to great risks. At night, there are no street lights, limiting movement especially for women.

UNHCR response to the Zamboanga Conflict

Protection monitoring



- More than 500 protection monitoring activities were conducted in more than 50 evacuation centers, numerous home-based IDP settings, and several return areas during the crisis and in the following years. A total of 26 IDP Protection Assessment Reports (IDPPAR) were published and used as advocacy tool to address protection issues and concerns.

At present, UNHCR continuously monitors the situation of about 1,080 persons (216 families) remaining in four transitory sites and in home-based settings, pending completion of all the permanent housing projects by the NHA. For issues related to child protection and gender-based violence, continuous referral of cases to relevant actors and partners is being carried out.

Provision of core relief items



- In coordination with the Zamboanga City Government, through the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO), a total of 27 Core Relief Items (CRI) distributions were carried out from May 2014 to December 2018. To date, a total of 14,045 persons (2,928 families) have received protection kits composed of 4x5 plastic sheets, fleece blankets, synthetic sleeping mats, jerry cans, and solar lamps. Clothes donated by private clothing retailer Uniqlo have also been provided. Persons with Specific Needs (PWSN) were prioritized in the selection of beneficiaries.
- Provision of CRIs by UNHCR is intended to complement the assistance from the City government to the remaining IDPs, both in the TS and in home-based settings.

Quick impact projects



- A total of four (4) Quick Impact Project (QIPs) were implemented in Zamboanga City, either directly or through local project partners. A key objective of the QIPs is to help facilitate the return of displaced families, especially to the islet barangays of Zamboanga City. The QIPs also complemented and supported the Government's efforts in identifying and facilitating IDPs' access to Durable Solutions.
- Around 2,360 persons (472 families) benefited from the interventions under QIPs, which include: boat registration (for use in community and/or livelihood activities); provision of 2 units of solar stilt dryers and 2 motorized boat (4' x 50'), used primarily to transport children to school; and construction of a 450-meter footbridge. Three (3) QIPs were implemented in return sites.

IDP Profiling



- In May 2014, the Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) requested UNHCR to support the CSWDO in profiling all IDPs, within and outside evacuation centers. This comprehensive profiling exercise is meant to ensure that no IDPs are left out of Government support and interventions, including in the provision of permanent shelter/relocation assistance.
- In partnership and close coordination with CSWDO, UNHCR carried out 3 phases of profiling in December 2014, December 2015, and December 2016, covering 66 barangays. A total of 6,474 families participated in the activity. The result of the profiling was used as baseline data by the different line agencies with roles in the Z3R Committee on Awards, Arbitration, and Beneficiary Selection (CAABS) in the identification of eligible home-based IDPs for inclusion in the awarding of permanent housing units. It was also used by local partners such as Community and Family Services International (CFSI) in identifying target beneficiaries for their shelter and livelihood projects.

IDP Consultations



- In July 2018, in close coordination with the City Government, UN OCHA and local partners, UNHCR facilitated a series of consultations among IDPs. These were intended to ensure full participation of IDPs in identifying crucial issues and recommending action points to the decision-makers in the City Government, particularly participating agencies in the Local Inter-Agency Committee (LIAC). It also served as a further venue for awareness-raising among IDPs regarding their rights, through brief orientation sessions on IDP rights, protection principles, and housing, land, and property rights in the context of displacement.
- A total of 128 representatives from the remaining IDPs in the Transitory Sites, home-based settings, and those families that have already been awarded with permanent housing units, attended these consultations. As a result, these IDP communities were able to express and summarize their most important concerns, particularly those related to the protection of their rights and access to durable solutions. The consolidated outputs were presented to the City Mayor and other members of the LIAC, with recommended ways forward to address the identified needs and outstanding gaps.

Protection Cluster Coordination

- UNHCR advocated for the activation of the Protection Cluster, and served as the co-lead in support to the DWSD – Region 9.
 - The cluster leadership was eventually turned over to the Zamboanga CSWDO. A total of 54 Protection Cluster meetings were held from the start of the crisis until the end of December 2016.
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Capacity building

- From January 2014 to December 2017, UNHCR was able to conduct twenty-eight (28) training activities, refresher workshops, and orientation sessions for different stakeholders working on the Zamboanga response. These include activities organized by humanitarian partners and other key actors, which UNHCR supported by providing inputs on Protection. Topics covered during these capacity-building initiatives focused on IDP Protection, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GPID), Protection Mainstreaming, and Humanitarian Information Management. Participants included Government stakeholders/duty-bearers, IDP representatives and community leaders, humanitarian actors and NGO partners, and local civil society organizations.
 - Generally, these capacity-building initiatives aimed to strengthen the knowledge and capacities of the key actors, particularly in the mainstreaming of protection in all aspects of the overall response to the protracted displacement situation as well as in early recovery and durable solutions planning. UNHCR's Information Management Unit also provided technical assistance and guidance to the CSWDO, City Housing Authority (CHA), and other partners in harmonizing, consolidating, managing, and analyzing information related to internal displacement.
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It was difficult since our livelihood was left in Layag-Layag. Because of the distance, we couldn't farm on schedule. We were always late coming back to plant, cultivate or even harvest the seaweed. When we finally returned, we began to hope again and feel at ease," shares Nurhan Anuddin, whose community was supported by UNHCR in restarting their livelihoods.

Zamboanga City Local Inter-Agency Committee

Since the early days of the Zamboanga Siege back in 2013, the UNHCR has been monitoring and responding to the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the city. It has offered support to the local government unit (LGU) as it responded to the crisis in real time, and as it eventually established a “committee composed of the LGU, national government agencies, international humanitarian agencies and partners, IDPs and other concerned non-government organizations (NGOs), peoples’ organizations (POs), and private sector to act as the decision-making, coordinating and consultative body, to include supervision and monitoring sub-communities that shall implement and/or cause the carrying out of the various activities, plans, programs, and projects” in response to the siege.

This committee is now known as the Local Inter-Agency Committee (LIAC), established through an Executive Order signed by Zamboanga City Mayor Isabelle G. Climaco on January 7, 2014.

More than five years after the siege, UNHCR continues to work in close coordination with the Zamboanga City LGU and LIAC. In July 2018, following the request of the Mayor Climaco, the CSWDO Officer organized a series of consultations along different clusters of IDPs – those who are still in transitory sites, those who are homebased, and those who have already transferred to permanent shelters. These consultations were done in partnership with UNHCR and with support from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Community and Family Services International (CFSI), and Integrated Resource Development for Tri-People (IRDT).

On March 2019, the UNHCR supported the conduct of a two-day LIAC Workshop, which is part of our continuous and shared effort to uphold the rights and dignity of IDPs in Zamboanga City. The workshop is “a venue to comprehensively discuss issues, to propose solution, and to decide on ways forward in an environment of mutual trust and respect.”



Ways forward

For the transitory sites

- Continue to lobby for the city government’s reinstatement of camp managers in the remaining TS, through the CSWDO.
- Address the issue of alleged unauthorized/illegal occupation of forty-two (42) housing units intended for IDP beneficiaries through a peaceful dialogue with the involvement of the CHA, NHA, Housing and Land Management Division, CSWDO, barangay local government units, and the Commission on Human Rights – Region IX.
- CHR to investigate alleged signing of waivers that allowed illegitimate occupancy of the 42 housing units.
- Lobby with the City Government and humanitarian actors for the repair of the boardwalks across the TS and improvement of the bunkhouses.
- Seek the support of the humanitarian community for the repair and improvement of the WASH facilities, especially latrines, in the TS.
- Call the attention of the NHA and seek for allocation funds for the repair of housing units that were damaged due to substandard construction, as well as installation of water and electricity connection in all permanent shelters.
- Support the CHA in the review and harmonization of the master list to avoid missing beneficiaries and double entries.
- City Government to conduct re-assessment of the “untagged” families, and conduct profiling if necessary, to verify their entitlement to assistance/other forms of support.
- Desludging of septic tanks, especially in Rio Hondo and Mampang TS, through facilitation by the City government and other WASH actors.
- Fast-track the installation of water and electricity connections.
- Expedite the awarding of completed housing units and transfer of IDPs, particularly from Mampang TS.
- Continue the City Government’s investigation against the “private fixer” who allegedly collected P6,500 from the IDPs for the installation of the water and electricity connection. If possible, retrieve the amount collected.
- Re-activate the Communication Working Group on an ad hoc basis, as a feedback and information dissemination mechanism for IDPs, especially on the plans and updates on the Z3R implementation.
- Increase the presence of Philippine National Police (PNP) personnel in the TS to reduce gang wars and riots. If possible, implement curfew hours for minors.
- Reinstate the camp managers to increase protection by presence, at least in the remaining TS until all IDPs are transferred to permanent housing.

For the IDPs in home-based settings

- Provide livelihood programs and projects, especially for the women, to support the head of the household and the host families.

- Fast-track the transfer of the home-based IDP to the permanent housing units to lessen the burdens of the host families.
- Conduct re-assessment, and/or re-profiling if needed, to validate eligibility of home-based IDPs for assistance and identify their needs as well as the issues they are facing.

For permanent housing

- Expedite the installation of water and electricity connections.
- Implement desludging of the septic tanks.
- Improve the availability of and access to livelihood trainings and programs, in cooperation with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).
- Install child-friendly and women-friendly spaces or community recreation facilities in the resettlement sites.
- Increase police presence to deter criminal activities; impose and strictly implement curfew hours.
- Repair and improve board walks (for the permanent housing built on stilts), along with the installation of street lights.
- Observing due process rights, evict unauthorized/illegal occupants whose presence prevents the transfer of legitimate beneficiaries to the units awarded to them.

ZAMBOANGA CITY: FIVE YEARS AFTER THE SIEGE



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