

**BACKGROUND RESEARCH TO  
THE UNICEF REGIONAL REPORT**  
Situation of Children in the Context  
of Migration in ASEAN Member States



**CASE-STUDY**

# Migration and Child Protection Responses

Responses to the protection needs of internally displaced children and families in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Philippines



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Cover photo: September 2019, in Sultan Kudarat, part of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines, a four-year-old girl sits at home in a two-room unit, part of a communal camp run by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). © UNICEF/UNI217243/Kokic

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## Acronyms

<b>BARMM</b>	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
<b>BIFF</b>	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
<b>CWC</b>	Council for the Welfare of Children
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DRRM</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
<b>EAPRO</b>	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
<b>FGDs</b>	Focus group discussions
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth interview
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>MILF</b>	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
<b>MSSD</b>	Ministry of Social Services and Development
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>SDWO</b>	Social Welfare and Development Officer
<b>SPMS</b>	Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (Datu Saudi Ampatuan town), Mamasapano and Shariff Saidona
<b>UNHCR</b>	United National High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Introduction

This report contains the findings of a study on responses to the protection needs of internally displaced<sup>1</sup> children and families in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and in particular within the “SPMS Box;” an area within Maguindanao that is characterised by ongoing conflict between government and non-government forces, along with considerable displacement. This study is part of a regional situation analysis of children affected by migration in ASEAN states, commissioned by UNICEF East-Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), through its European Union-UNICEF co-funded programme, ‘Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia’ (2018 – 2022).

The aim of the research was to develop an in depth, contextual understanding of the protection risks and needs of internally displaced children and their families in BARMM and how these risks are managed, including the systems and services in place to address these risks. In particular, the following research questions were considered:

1. What are the main protection risks and needs of children and their families / carers who have experienced internal displacement within SPMS box? How and why do these risks and needs differ for girls and women and men and boys?
2. What are the drivers or factors that have contributed to these protection risks and needs?
3. How do children and families manage protection risks and needs?
4. What responses are in place to address protection risks and needs of girls and boys and their families / carers?
  - a. In particular: what protection systems and services (Government and NGO) are in place and how effective are they at meeting the needs of boys and girls and their families / carers?
  - b. How accessible are protection systems and services to boys and girls and their families / carers?
  - c. What are the gaps or challenges in responding to protection risks and needs of boys and girls and their families / carers?
5. How has the Covid-19 pandemic and related movement restrictions and other containment measures impacted on the safety and wellbeing of displaced boys and girls and their families / carers?

The case study utilised a qualitative methodology, which included: a desk review of relevant data, UN reports, academic articles and news articles related to the situation of internally displaced children and parents in SPMS Box (and BARMM more generally); a series 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 22 adolescents (13 – 18 years) and 27 parents / caregivers from Municipalities in SPMS Box with experience of living in situations of displacement; six in-depth life history interviews, which explored participants’ life trajectory and

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<sup>1</sup> An internally displaced person is “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”: United National Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement’, 1998, para. 2.

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circumstances in a detailed way, along with their experiences and perceptions of risk and challenges, and how they access systems and services; and six key informant interviews (KIIs) and two FGDs with key Government Ministries, and Government and NGO service providers working with displaced populations in SPMS Box.

## 1.2 Findings

### 1.2.2 Drivers and profile of displacement in SPMS Box

Displacement among research participants tended to be sporadic, frequent and often short-term, with displaced persons fleeing in response to (or at time pre-empting) armed conflict between Government and non-Government armed groups. Displacement was described as quite sudden and disorganised, in which persons fleeing conflict made their own way to a safe area. Where conflict and flooding co-occur, the participants recounted considerable challenges in evacuating quickly and finding a safe place. Poverty was identified as both a driver and a cause or consequence of regular forced displacement – persons who are poor appear most at risk of displacement, as they have little option but to return to their homes (and revenue sources) following a disaster, even if their homes are in low lying areas or areas otherwise prone to experiencing natural disasters.

While participants demonstrated strong resilience in the face of continued and regular situations of displacement, they noted the challenge of living in a precarious and fluid situation, including the feeling of being constantly 'on edge', and the challenge in maintaining stable livelihoods. Livelihoods appear to be very attached to the lands and homes of the participants, and this appears to limit their ability to move too far from their homes and to stay away for prolonged periods of time. This can mean that displaced persons return quite quickly to their homes, as they are unable to generate livelihoods without being able to tend crops and livestock on their land.

### 1.2.3 Protection risks and challenges

The direct impacts of armed conflict were mentioned by participants as being a considerable risk to children, who are constantly exposed to injury and even death by being caught up in armed conflict, with poverty compounding these risks; some participants, for instance, noted that residents had been killed or injured going into 'red alert' areas to tend to crops. The constant presence of conflict and routine displacement also indirectly drives protection risks as it disrupts the protective environment for children, impacting on the ability for parents / carers to meet the needs of their children. It also impacts negatively on the broader systems of protection for children, disrupting their access to schools, health clinics and social welfare programmes. Other protection risks were also explored:

**Family separation:** Research participants tended to mention cases in which evacuations happened quickly and unexpectedly, and in the process of moving, children were at times left behind or became separated from their parents. In these cases, children are typically only separated temporarily - often only for a few hours - and they are usually taken in by a relative or neighbour.

**Child marriage:** Child marriage is widely practiced in BARMM and it appears that children in situations of displacement are at heightened risk, as displacement can exacerbate drivers of child marriage. For instance, limited access to education and economic opportunities and economic distress of parents are exacerbated by displacement. Pressures to adhere to cultural and social norms that control and limit the sexuality of adolescents (girls in particular) appear to be compounded in situations of displacement and insecurity - a

situation associated with disruption, less parental guidance and greater opportunities for social interactions among adolescents.

**Child labour:** According to research participants, children in displacement may be drawn into child labour – at times in hazardous situations – given the disruption to their parents' / family's livelihoods caused by the displacement. Participants tended to stress that parents did not consider it desirable for their children to be working, but that they at times had little option due to disruptions to their usual livelihoods.

**Recruitment into armed groups:** It was noted by key informants that children in evacuation centres – particularly boys – are exposed to the risk of recruitment by armed groups, through being in an unstable situation in which they may be experiencing a sense of resentment toward Government armed forces who they see as responsible for their situation of displacement.

**Violence and abuse:** Key informants mentioned that children – particularly girls – residing in evacuation centres are at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, sometimes triggered by the lack of child- and family-friendly spaces and facilities. Participants also expressed that displacement can compound the more immediate triggers of family violence, including income distress, and emotional stress, perhaps placing displaced families (women and children in particular), at greater risk of family violence.

#### 1.2.4 Systems and services for children and families in displacement

The BARMM Government delivers a range of social welfare services, largely through five welfare programmes established in 1991 by the national office of the national Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Under the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao 2018, social services now fall under the authority of BARMM (principally the Ministry for Social Services and Development – MSSD), rather than the national government. Social welfare programmes include comprehensive emergency assistance packages for persons in situations of displacement.

However, the study identified a range of barriers and bottlenecks to the effective delivery of protection services to children and families in displacement. Some of these challenges are specific to working within the emergency and displacement context, though other more general and systemic challenges were also explored. It was found that, in general, gaps and challenges within the child protection system are underpinned by a lack of policy direction, with no overarching policy or coordination mechanism to guide the development of child protection systems and services. There is also a lack of instruments to operationalise the system, including a comprehensive law, regulations or operational guidance setting out the mandates and functions of different bodies, and establishing comprehensive child protection mandates and accountabilities. Also, child protection structures at the sub-regional level in BARMM are severely under-capacitated, and there is a heavy reliance on NGOs to deliver services. There are a very limited number of Social Welfare Officers (SWOs), particularly at LGU level. Case management systems and child protection services (particularly prevention services) are very limited.

These challenges appear to be heightened and have particularly profound impacts in the context of displacement in SPMS Box. Given the limited number of SWOs, it was reported by key informants that they tend to be deployed solely to deliver food and other material assistance, with very limited focus on programmes aimed at preventing violence, exploitation and abuse, identifying and responding to protection risks and addressing the psycho-social needs of children and families. Also, it was noted that, at times when

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whole communities need to evacuate, systems and services are disrupted because local level service providers are also in displacement, limiting their ability to provide stable service delivery. The constant displacement of children and families also causes considerable disruption to child protection programmes, as children and families enrolled in programmes (parenting sessions, case management etc.) are constantly needing to evacuate, limiting their ability to engage in these programmes, and impacting on the programme's continuity. SWOs also face challenges in ensuring they are able to spend sufficient time in conflict affected areas in order to effectively distribute humanitarian assistance, given the volatile security context. Service delivery was also reported to be complicated by the corruption of processes by political interests.

### 1.2.5 Access to protection systems and services

The data suggest a range of barriers to displaced persons accessing more formal protection systems and services, and a strong reliance of less formal community mechanisms. One barrier appears to be social and cultural beliefs and practices surrounding family and sexual violence. The FGDs with adolescents and parents / carers demonstrated that violence within the family does not tend to be seen as a child protection risk. Sexual violence appears to be heavily stigmatised, and fears of bring shame on the family and / or of reprisal appears to tightly restrict the ability for children and families to report cases of sexual violence and seek help. In these cases, given the stigma surrounding sexual violence, key stakeholders reported that the use of mediation and family or community resolution mechanisms were ways of 'settling' the matter and avoiding social complications, thereby limiting the ability of victims and survivors to access justice systems and protection services, and other forms of support, including psycho-social support.

Other practical barriers were mentioned by respondents to accessing protection systems and services, for instance that support often arrives too late. Stakeholders also mentioned that children and families may not be aware of where to report child protection concerns.

### 1.2.6 Impact of Covid-19 containment measures

The challenges facing internally displaced persons were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Displaced communities experienced movement restrictions but without robust protective mechanisms in place in their camps and evacuation centres. Poor conditions in camps – which often lack the space for physical distancing and proper partitions to isolate Covid-positive persons – made it difficult for displaced persons to avoid infection. Also, the impact of Covid-related restrictions on livelihoods are likely to have been particularly acute for displaced persons, who already suffer disruptions to work and income streams. Adolescent and parent / carer research participants in particular mentioned the impact that Covid-19 had on their livelihoods, for instance, in restricting the ability for parents and carers to sell farm produce at the markets, further compounding the negative impacts of displacement.

## 2 Conclusions and recommendations

Routine and recurring displacements, driven by a mix of conflict, flooding and *rido*, have impacted on the ability of families and service providers to ensure a protective environment for children in SPMS Box. The case study demonstrates not only the severe protection risks and challenges experienced by displaced families and children, it also demonstrates the considerable challenges in delivering and accessing protection services in a very unstable and insecure context.

Based on the case study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The BARMM Government should ensure that a specific IDP law is adopted, which sets out the rights and entitlements of displaced children, families and individuals and fully complies with international standards;
- As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen the child protection system in BARMM, the Government of BARMM should develop a comprehensive vision, policy and costed strategy / action plan for the strengthening of the child protection system. It should ensure that the rights and entitlements of displaced children and families are comprehensively covered within these initiatives, and that the views of children and families in displacement be captured to ensure they are meaningfully engaged in this process.
- MSSD should develop and adopt detailed regulations and guidance (e.g. Standard Operating Procedures) that provide detail on how the child protection system should be implemented in practice in the context of displacement. The SOPs should detail how the village / community child protection system connects to the provincial level system, in particular through developing robust referral pathways from the village level for child protection cases, including cases involving sexual violence and child marriage in the context of displacement.
- As part of its ongoing efforts to establish and strengthen multi-sector child protection committees at the local level, headed by LSWDOs, MSSD should ensure that the Committees receive comprehensive training and tools on addressing child protection needs in situations of displacement.
- It is recommended that the MSSD consider the development of robust public-private partnerships / outsourcing to expand child protection services for children and families in displacement, while at the same time maintaining control and oversight over the system.
- It is also recommended that learning from successful existing (I)NGO-Government partnerships (e.g. the Join Child Protection / Gender-based Violence Working Group) be utilised to inform the strengthening of government-NGO partnerships.
- As part of its efforts to develop and expand case management services within its child protection system, it is recommended that MSSD ensure that children and families in displacement are covered by this system.
- It is recommended that a mechanism for feedback and complaints for children and families in displacement be developed and implemented. Avenues for meaningful engagement in the development and strengthening of child protection systems and services more generally should also be developed, and care should be taken to ensure it includes children from a range of circumstances and situations, including children in vulnerable situations.
- It is recommended that MSSD implement evidence-based social behaviour change strategies to prevent child marriage, harmful child labour and the involvement of children in armed groups.

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## 2. Introduction

### 3.12.1 Background and rationale

#### 2.1.1 Background to the study

This report contains the findings of a study on responses to the protection needs of internally displaced<sup>2</sup> children and families in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The study considered populations displaced by conflict, feuds, natural disasters, along with other drivers, and also considered how these drivers inter-relate and how displacement is often complex and compounded by multiple causes and vulnerabilities.<sup>3</sup> The study focused, in particular, on internally displaced populations within the “SPMS Box”. The SPMS box is a military term referring to the towns of Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (Datu Saudi Ampatuan town), Mamasapano and Shariff Saydona: an area characterised by ongoing conflict between government and non-government forces and displacement.

This case study is part of a regional situation analysis of children affected by migration in ASEAN states, commissioned by UNICEF East-Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), through its European Union-UNICEF co-funded programme, ‘Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia’ (2018 – 2022). It is anticipated that this research will inform efforts within ASEAN to support children affected by migration, including the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (2019) and the Regional Plan of Action (2021) for its implementation. This study is one of a series of six in-depth case studies across different ASEAN countries which aim to explore, in a localised, contextualised and in-depth manner, the various ways in which children may be affected by migration.

This study was designed and led by Coram International, with assistance from UNICEF Philippines and BARMM’s Ministry for Social Services and Development (MSSD). Data collection for the study was carried out with the assistance of Coram International’s national researcher, Vivian Escoton.

#### 2.1.2 Rationale for the research

The Philippines has a long history of internal displacement that is driven by a range of factors and triggers. The Philippines regularly ranks among the world’s top countries for new displacements associated with disasters. Displacements associated with conflict and violence are also common, particularly in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where internal conflicts involving various actors (including Muslim separatists, clan militias, criminal groups, political clans, including communist groups, and between government forces and certain extremist armed groups including those inspired by the Islamic State)

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<sup>2</sup> An internally displaced person is “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”: United National Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement’, 1998, para. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Weerasinghe, S, *Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia*. 2021. UNHCR and IOM.

have displaced people for decades. Conflict and violence continue in parts of the country, with clashes between different groups and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).<sup>4</sup>

There are very limited data available detailing protection risks facing displaced children and families, along with comprehensive information on how these risks are managed by communities and the effectiveness of systems and services to respond to these needs. Research which examines these issues from the perspective of displaced children and families themselves is particularly limited. Therefore, this case study aims to generate an improved understanding of child protection risks and the mechanisms, systems and services that respond to these risks, primarily from the perspectives of displaced children and families themselves.

BARMM has a Protection Working Group which is co-led by the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2019, BARMM also launched a new emergency and disaster response office – the Rapid Emergency Action on Disaster Incidence (READi-BARMM), which replaced the disaster response office previously known as ARMM Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team (ARMM-HEART). BARMM’s child protection system is also mandated to prevent and respond to child protection risks generally, including among families affected by displacement.

However, access to services and support can be limited – displaced persons who live with relatives or friends may fail to register with government or humanitarian actors or they may be concerned about being perceived as affiliated with non-State groups and therefore avoid registration. They may therefore struggle to access services and support.<sup>5</sup> Persons without identity documents (including a substantial proportion of Indigenous populations) are at heightened risk, as their status (absence of identity documents) limits their access to government services. Birth registration among some Indigenous populations in BARMM is particularly low.<sup>6</sup> Also, the ability for Government protection systems and services to reach and provide an effective response to populations affected by ongoing and frequent displacement is very challenging.

## 2.2 Research aims and questions

The aim of the research was to develop an in depth, contextual understanding of the protection risks and needs of internally displaced children and their families in BARMM and how these risks are managed, including the systems and services in place to address these risks. The research took an explicit gender focus, examining the particular situations and protection risks facing girls and boys, and how sensitive systems and services are to the needs of boys and girls. Displaced women and girls, in particular, “*tend to be at greater risk of deprivation, insecurity, abuse, neglect and a general deterioration of their wellbeing.*”<sup>7</sup> The research explored the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the situation of displaced children and families, and whether and how the pandemic has contributed to protection risks and needs.

Five specific research questions were developed, as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Weerasinghe, S, *Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia*. 2021. UNHCR and IOM.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See UNICEF Philippines and Coram International, *Situation analysis of children in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao*, 2017, p. 239 – 240.

<sup>7</sup> Cazabat, C, *Hidden in plain sight: Women and girls in internal displacement*, 2020, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, IMPACT and Plan International, p. 6.

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6. What are the main protection risks and needs of children and their families / carers who have experienced internal displacement within SPMS box? How and why do these risks and needs differ for girls and women and men and boys?
  7. What are the drivers or factors that have contributed to these protection risks and needs?
  8. How do children and families manage protection risks and needs?
  9. What responses are in place to address protection risks and needs of girls and boys and their families / carers?
    - a. In particular: what protection systems and services (Government and NGO) are in place and how effective are they at meeting the needs of boys and girls and their families / carers?
    - b. How accessible are protection systems and services to boys and girls and their families / carers?
    - c. What are the gaps or challenges in responding to protection risks and needs of boys and girls and their families / carers?
  10. How has the Covid-19 pandemic and related movement restrictions and other containment measures impacted on the safety and wellbeing of displaced boys and girls and their families / carers?

## 2.3 Scope

The target population of the study was children and their families / carers who were internally displaced within BARMM (and in particular, in SPMS box). This included children who were accompanied by family / carers and those who were unaccompanied or who had been separated. The study also explored the risks and challenges faced by social welfare service providers with responsibilities for addressing protection risks of internally displaced children and families within BARMM.

## 3 Definitions of key terms

This case study uses the following understandings of key terms and concepts:

**‘Children affected by migration’ (CABM)** is a broad umbrella term that encompasses children (those aged under 18 years)<sup>8</sup> who move or have moved within their country of origin, or across the border into another State, temporarily or permanently. This includes children who migrate voluntarily or involuntarily, whether as a result of forced displacement due to national disaster or conflict, or for economic, social, educational or cultural reasons; or individually or to accompany parents who have migrated internally. It also includes children affected by the migration of a parent / parents (‘children remaining behind’).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This is in accordance with international definitions of childhood, in particular, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1. It should be noted that in the domestic law of some ASEAN States, such as Thailand, children who have attained majority through marriage are not included within the definition of ‘child’ in the Child Protection Act 2003. In addition, in some domestic laws, such as the Philippine Republic Act 7610 a child over the age of 18 who cannot fully take care of himself because of a physical or mental disability or condition is included within the definition of a child.

<sup>9</sup> Joint General Comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of migration, CRC/C/GC/22 16 November 2017, para. 9. See also UNDESA which defines an international migrant as anyone who changes his or her country of usual residence 1 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1998). Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration,

**'Internally displaced persons'** are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border"<sup>10</sup> The key elements of this definition (which is descriptive, rather than providing for a legal status) are: (1) The involuntary character of the movement; and (2) The fact that such movement takes place within national borders. Internally displaced persons include both citizens as well as other habitual residents of the country in which they are displaced, which may include, for example, stateless persons.

**'Child protection'** is the prevention and response to "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse"<sup>11</sup> against persons under 18 years of age.<sup>12</sup> This includes an examination of the types of protection risks to which children affected by migration may be exposed and the response of child protection systems and services to these risks.

Violence against children may be perpetrated through actions or omissions.<sup>13</sup> **Physical violence** is the deliberate or intentional use of physical force that either results in or has the potential to result in causing bodily harm.<sup>14</sup> **Emotional violence** is the ongoing infliction of emotional pain through, for example, bullying, humiliating, scaring, terrorising, threatening, isolating, controlling and generally diminishing self-worth. Emotional violence can also include, in the case of children, witnessing intimate partner violence.<sup>15</sup> **Sexual violence** is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting.<sup>16</sup> **Neglect** is the failure of those responsible for a child's care to meet their physical and psychological needs, to protect them from danger or obtain basic services (as long as caregivers have the means, knowledge and access to such services).<sup>17</sup> **Child exploitation** refers to the use of children in work or other activities for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, development and education. It can include harmful child labour and sexual exploitation, which is any situation

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Revision 1. Sales No. E.98.XVII.14; and International Organization for Migration: Who is a migrant? [www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant](http://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement', 1998, para. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19(1); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 13 (2011), The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, 18 April 2011, CRC/C/GC/13 (CRC GC No. 13 (2011)), para 4.

<sup>12</sup> This is in accordance with Article 1 of the CRC.

<sup>13</sup> The meaning and significance the provisions contained in Article 19 are further explained by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.

<sup>14</sup> This is a relatively narrow definition of physical violence based on the broader definition of violence in the World Report on Violence and Health. See Krug et al, *World report on violence and health*, World Health Organisation, 2002, p. 5, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12384003/>, accessed 1 November 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General comment no. 13: The right of the child to protection from all forms of violence*, 2011, CRC/C/GC/13, para. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *World report on violence and health* (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Jewkes, Sen & Garcia-Moreno, 2002 at p.149 [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42495/1/9241545615\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42495/1/9241545615_eng.pdf) [12.07.17] It is noted that the definitions of sexual violence differ according to the age of the victim / survivor. Children below the legal age of consent will often be considered a victim of (statutory) rape. This is discussed in more detail below.

<sup>17</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General comment no. 13: The right of the child to protection from all forms of violence*, 2011, CRC/C/GC/13, para. 20.

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where the victim takes part in sexual activity in exchange for a gain or benefit (or for the promise of a gain or benefit) to themselves or a third party.<sup>18</sup> This definition encompasses prostitution and pornography, including online sexual exploitation.<sup>19</sup> In practice, child exploitation frequently overlaps with child trafficking.

Displaced children are exposed to the risk of **child trafficking**, which is a legal term that refers to “*the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or for other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control of another person for the purposes of exploitation.*”<sup>20</sup> However, it should be noted that force or coercion is not required to be established for trafficking in children to occur.

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<sup>18</sup> Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children, *Terminology Guidelines*, June 2016.

<http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/terminologyguidelines.pdf> p 23.

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_79672.html](https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_79672.html)

<sup>20</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000) (The Palermo Protocol), Article 1.

## 4. Methodology

The case study utilised a qualitative methodology, in order to obtain an in-depth, contextual understanding of the protection risks and needs facing internally displaced populations in BARMM, the systems and services designed to respond to these needs, and whether and how displaced persons access these systems. The methodology was specifically designed to be participatory, primarily involving interactive focus group discussions with adolescents and parents / carers and in-depth individual interviews with children and parents / carers in situations of displacement.

### 3.1 Data collection methods

#### 3.1.1 Desk-based research

A desk review was carried out of relevant UN reports, academic articles and news articles related to the situation of internally displaced children and parents in SPMS Box (and BARMM more generally). In addition, a mapping of governance structures and services related to the protection of children and families in BARMM (particularly those in displacement) was carried out to provide researchers with a broad understanding of the structures in place to support the target population of children before data collection and analysis began, as well as to assist with the identification of stakeholders for qualitative interviews. The study also utilised a comprehensive legal and policy analysis focused on social welfare, child protection and child justice in BARMM that was being carried out for a separate study by the authors.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1.2 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions were conducted with small groups of adolescents / young people from Municipalities in SPMS Box with experience of living in situations of displacement in order to learn about their experiences, challenges, risks, knowledge of protection systems and services and to understand their help seeking behaviours. FGDs were also held with groups of parents / carers of displaced children in SPMS Box. The FGDs explored participants' lived experiences of displacement and their feelings of risk and safety. FGDs also included an interactive discussion focused on a series of vignettes presenting different situations that might be faced by young people like them in displacement. The discussion explored the decisions faced by the adolescents and young people in the vignettes, what advice the participants would give them, and what the likely outcomes would be for the young people, thereby allowing for examination of the barriers or challenges facing participants in a concrete and applied though non-confrontational way. Prior to the commencement of data collection, FGD tools were piloted with one group of adolescents and one group of parents / carers with experience of displacement to allow adjustments to be made to the data collection tools and processes. Researchers aimed to include a diverse range of participants in the FGDs who were or had faced different situations of displacement, with roughly even numbers of males and females. In total, 10 FGDs were carried out with 22 adolescents (13 – 18 years) and 27 parents / carers as detailed in the table below. FGDs were carried out in central locations and participants in displacement were transported from around SPMS Box, owing to the security situation at the time of data collection.

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<sup>21</sup> During the course of the case study research, the authors were simultaneously carrying out research on the social welfare, child protection and child justice systems in BARMM as consultants to UNICEF Philippines.

**Figure 1: Description of Focus Groups Discussions**

Location and date	Description
Maguindanao PSWDO	1. FGD with 5 adolescents, 16 – 18 years, 12 March 2022 (pilot). 2. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 12 March 2022 (pilot).
Sharif Aguak	3. FGD with 5 adolescents, 13 – 17 years, 15 March 2022. 4. FGD with 2 adolescents (14 and 18 years) and 2 carers, 15 March 2022. 5. FGD with 5 parents / carers, (insert ages) 15 March 2022.
Datu Salibu	6. FGD with 5 adolescents, 13 – 16 years, 17 March 2022. 7. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 36 – 52 years, 17 March 2022.
Shariff Saiduna	8. FGD with 5 adolescents, 15 – 17 years, 16 March 2022. 9. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 16 March 2022.
Datu Saudi	10. FGD with 10 parents / carers, 18 – 37 years, 18 March 2022.

### 3.1.3 In-depth life history interviews (IDIs)

In order to explore, in an in-depth manner, the experiences and situation of children and parents in displacement, a small number of individual interviews were carried out. These interviews used a life history format, which explored participants' life trajectory and circumstances in a detailed way, along with their experiences and perceptions of risk and challenges, and how they access systems and services. In total, six IDIs were carried out:

**Figure 2: Description of Individual life history interviews**

<b>Adolescents</b>	1. Boy, 16 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022 2. Girl, 13 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022 3. Girl, 16 years, Datu Saiduna, 16 March 2022
<b>Parents / carers</b>	4. Female, 38 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022 5. Male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022 6. Male, 72 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022

Several of these life history interviews overlapped with key informant interviews (below), as participants were service providers within their communities, while also having lived experience of displacement. In these cases, tools for the IDIs and KIIs were merged.

### 3.1.4 Key informant interviews (KIIs) / FGDs

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with a small number of stakeholders at the national and municipal levels to collect data on systems, services and challenges in the provision of services to children and families in displacement, along with contextual information on the drivers and profile of displacement in SPMS Box. In total, six KIIs were carried out, with representatives of the Council on the Welfare of Children, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Development (MSSD), UNICEF, UNHCR and with two local Government

(Barangay<sup>22</sup>) service providers within SPMS Box. In addition, two focus group discussions were carried out: one with four Municipal Social Welfare Officers from municipalities within SPMS Box, and one with four NGOs / CSOs which work with displaced populations in SPMS Box.

## 4 Data analysis

The team used a thematic analysis to explore the qualitative data; all interviews and FGDs were transcribed in English. Data was reviewed and coded to identify key themes, connections and explanations relevant to the research questions.

## 5 Verification and validation

An earlier draft of this report was reviewed and key findings validated by key child protection staff members at UNICEF Philippines (Mindanao Field Office) and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

## 6 Ethics

The research project was carried out in compliance with UNICEF’s *Ethics Charter and Guidance for Ethical Research Involving Children*,<sup>23</sup> Coram International’s *Ethical Guidelines for Field Research with Children* and recent guidance relating to data collection during Covid-19.<sup>24</sup> The team developed a detailed ethical protocol for the research (attached at Annex 6.1), and a full ethical review was carried out for the research by Coram’s external review board, with approval obtained prior to the commencement of the data collection.

## 7 Limitations

The table below provides a summary of the limitations of this study and the steps taken by Coram International to mitigate these limitations.

Constraints/ Limitations	Mitigating Strategies
<b>Covid-19 outbreak and remote data collection</b>	The Covid-19 outbreak put significant constraints on data collection and travel, limiting the international research team’s ability to collect data face to face, meaning a small number of interviews with key informants were carried out remotely. There are some limitations to collecting qualitative data remotely; technical and connectivity issues have the potential to interrupt the interview, and it can be more difficult for the interviewer to build a ‘rapport’ with the participant, which may have discouraged the participant from sharing freely and openly, ultimately decreasing the quality of the data collected. In order to mitigate these impacts, the team has:

<sup>22</sup> The smallest administrative district forming the most local level of government in the Philippines.

<sup>23</sup> Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D. and Fitzgerald, R. *Ethical research involving children* (2013), UNICEF Innocenti: Florence.

<sup>24</sup> Berman, G., *Ethical considerations for evidence generation involving children on the COVID-19 pandemic* (2020), UNICEF Innocenti: Florence, DP 2020:01; The Market Research Society, *MRS Post-Covid-19 lockdown guidance: undertaking safe face-to-face data collection*, 14 July 2020.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitored the situation on a continuous basis, in order to inform decisions regarding travel and any necessary amendments to data collection procedures;</li> <li>• Carried out national data collection through virtual means;</li> <li>• Where face to face data collection was conducted, Covid-19 safety measures were put in place; and</li> <li>• Ensured robust training, mentoring and supervision of national consultants through virtual connection.</li> </ul>
<b>Potential reporting bias and recall bias</b>	Professional stakeholders may have selectively revealed or suppressed information, hoping to ‘look good’ rather than to present the realities of their work. To mitigate against reporting bias, the research team emphasised the anonymity and confidentiality of the research to stakeholders, in order to encourage honest, transparent responses.
<b>Security risks</b>	The security situation in SPMS Box was, and continues to be, highly volatile. This resulted in restricted access to certain research locations. However, the Team were able to mitigate these risks by working with UNICEF Philippines and their key Government and NGO partners to identify and recruit research participants and ensure their safe transportation into more safe and stable locations (typically larger towns – both within and outside SPMS Box).

## 5. Context: Displacement of children and families in BARMM and SPMS Box

The Philippines has a long history of internal displacement that is driven by a range of factors and triggers. UNHCR identified 105,214 internally displaced persons in the Philippines as at the end of 2021 (the number of children included within this figure is not reported) – this was a decrease from the start of 2021, in which UNHCR had identified 150,368 internally displaced persons.<sup>25</sup> According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, around 140,100 new displacements (instances of displacement, not total number of persons displaced) associated with conflict and violence were recorded in the Philippines in 2021, the majority in Mindanao.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre recorded just under 5.7 million instances of displacement linked to natural disasters, some of which were pre-emptive evacuations. Earthquakes, volcanic activity, cyclones, storms and floods displace millions of people every year across the country.<sup>27</sup>

### 5.14.1 Displacement in BARMM

An estimated 23,746 families were displaced across Mindanao as at 30 August 2022; 79 per cent of displaced persons in Mindanao were in BARMM.<sup>28</sup> According to UNHCR, these displaced populations fall into three main groups, depending on the length of time they are or have been displaced:

- 2,799 families (10,477 individuals) were displaced within the past month;
- 146 families (730 individuals) remain displaced and have been displaced for more than 30 days (but less than 180 days); and
- 20,801 families (102,169 individuals) have remained displaced for over 180 days.<sup>29</sup>

The longer-term displaced populations are largely driven into displacement by conflict, and this includes 3,017 families (11,537 individuals) who remained displaced in BARMM provinces due to armed conflict, clan feuds, crime and violence and natural disasters, along with 16,749 families (83,745 individuals) who are still displaced due to the Marawi siege in May 2017.<sup>30</sup>

However, some limitations of these data on displaced persons should be noted. In the context of armed conflict, displacement may be sudden and pre-emptory, as is the case with persons fleeing to avoid harm in anticipation of conflict erupting. In these cases, movements may not necessarily be recognised as displacement, as ‘nothing has happened’ to trigger the movement. In addition, displacement triggered by *rido*

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<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, Global trends: Forced displacement in 2021, 2022, Full Annexed Tables (Table 4).

<sup>26</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Philippines, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/philippines>

<sup>27</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Philippines, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/philippines>

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR, Mindanao displacement dashboard, Issue No. 90, March 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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(i.e. clan feuds) is not always recognised.<sup>31</sup> Also, published data which is disaggregated by age or gender does not appear to be available.

While data often consider internally displaced populations separately according to the primary trigger of displacement (conflict, natural disaster), a recent study has noted that these triggers can be inter-connected and it is important to consider the functioning of different drivers and triggers as they relate to individual cases of displacement. This is important in considering needs and responses comprehensively and holistically. According to UNHCR, in Mindanao, natural disasters, such as typhoons, earthquakes and floods “exacerbate vulnerabilities in areas already beset by armed conflict and other forms of violence.”<sup>32</sup> A recent study by UNHCR and IOM noted that many countries are affected by both conflict and disaster, and in these places, conflict and disaster as triggers of displacement interact and overlap. Overlapping triggers “undermine resilience, heighten risks, compound conditions of vulnerability and exacerbate protection needs.”<sup>33</sup>

It has been noted that in parts of Maguindanao province, people are repeatedly displaced by conflict and violence as well as by disasters. Multiple displacements compound situations of vulnerability, creating complexities that are difficult to address. Displacement can be temporary or protracted; they can also be repetitive, driven by the same or different triggers, causing diverse challenges and resulting in different protection needs for children and families. Displacements can also be pre-emptive, particularly in conflict contexts.<sup>34</sup>

## 5.2 Dynamics of displacement in SPMS Box

As noted above, the study location is the SPMS Box. SPMS box is a military term referring to the towns of Shariff Aguak, Pagatin (Datu Saudi Ampatuan town), Mamasapano and Shariff Saidona (see Figure 1, below) which are all located in Maguindanao province.

### Figure 1: Map of SPMS box

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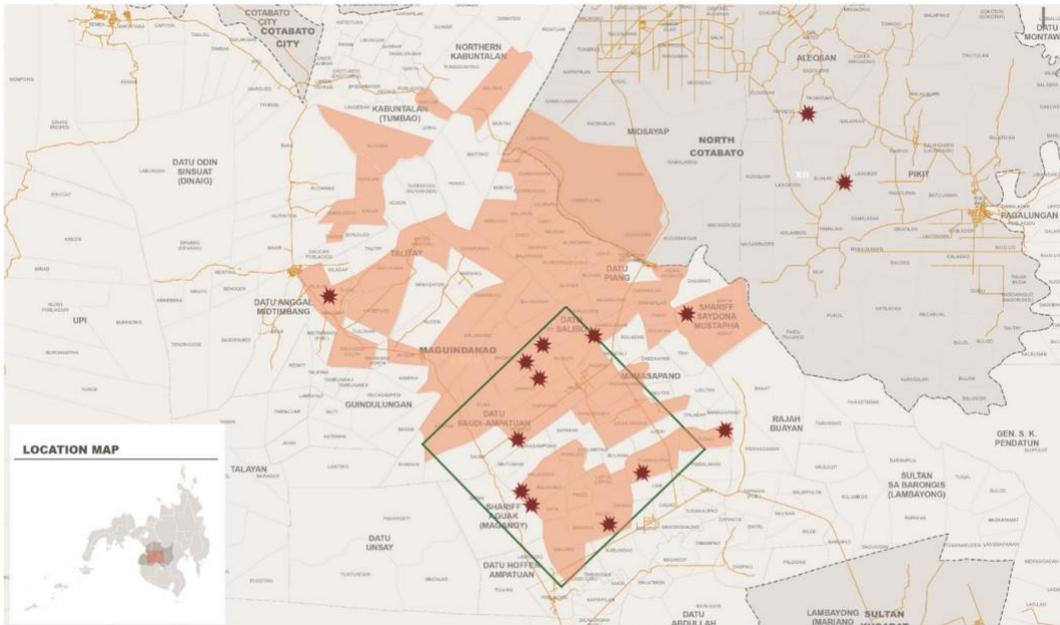
<sup>31</sup> Weerasinghe, S, Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia. 2021. UNHCR and IOM. A rido (clan feud) is a state of recurring hostilities between families and kinship groups characterized by a series of re- taliatory acts of violence carried out to avenge a perceived affront or injustice.

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, The IDP Initiative: Quarterly Update, June 2021, available at:

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/IDP%20Initiative%20Update%20June%202021.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Weerasinghe, S, Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia. 2021. UNHCR and IOM, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



Source: Protection Cluster, IDP Protection assessment report: Armed conflict and protracted displacement in Central Mindanao (AFP and MILF vs JMWA and BIFF), Issue No. 1, 2017: <http://www.protectionclusterphilippines.org/?p=1264>

Armed confrontations between the combined forces of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (MILF-BIAF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines against the Jamaatul Muhajirin Wal Ansar (JMWA) has, since 2017, caused recurring displacements within SPMS Box.<sup>35</sup> Other drivers of displacement in these areas include clan feuds (‘rido’) in which civilians engage in violence, particularly over land. The situation of displaced persons is “compounded by vulnerability to various hazards, like typhoons, flash floods, and landslides.”<sup>36</sup>

Most recently, operations in March 2021 in these areas between the AFP and MILF-BIAF caused displacement due to persistent security risks, including mortar shelling against BIAF operatives and ground gunfights between AFP forces and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Based on information from MSSD, 9,347 families (approximately 46,735 individuals) were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge with relatives or in evacuation centres.<sup>37</sup> As of September 2021, according to MSSD, around 847 families (approximately 4,435 individuals) in the municipalities of Datu Anggal Midtimbang, Datu Odin Sinusat, Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Shari Aguak, and South Upi remained displaced.

According to recent Government reports, in 2021, the municipalities of SPMS Box experienced seven to 10 instances of displacement. Displacement caused by armed conflict has tended to be repeated and cyclical. Residents in these municipalities have become quite resilient and adept at evacuating their homes regularly, though displacement has caused damage to homes and disruption of livelihoods and education of children.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Protection Cluster, IDP Protection Assessment Report, Armed Conflict and Protracted Displacement in Central Mindanao (AFP and MILF vs JMWA and BIFF), Issue no. 01, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Oxfam Philippines, Maguindanao is a forgotten crisis: <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/stories/maguindanao-forgotten-crisis>.

<sup>37</sup> IDPAR No. 5, 2021: Armed conflict between AFP and BIFF in Maguindanao province, March 2021.

<sup>38</sup> BARMM, Emergency / disaster update in Maguindanao province, 8 March 2022 (from PPT provided to authors by BARMM Government officials).

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### 5.3 Protection risks and needs

Many IDPs in BARMM, who shelter in evacuation centres or in host communities, return to their places of origin relatively quickly; however, the protection needs of these populations can be ongoing, requiring ongoing assistance. Some IDPs may experience protracted displacement, in which protection risks, such as exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation can be heightened. IDPs can also have acute psychosocial needs that need to be promptly identified and addressed.<sup>39</sup> Displacement due to conflict has also been identified as a driver of trafficking in the Philippines.<sup>40</sup> Data (though not specific to BARMM or Mindanao) also indicate that rates of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy tend to increase in the context of conflict, natural disasters and displacement.<sup>41</sup> In 2019, Oxfam conducted a reproductive health survey in five conflict-affected provinces in BARMM, including Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. At least 253 people, or 24 per cent of the 1,058 respondents, reported cases of child marriage. Of those who reported that they were married as children, 97 per cent were girls.<sup>42</sup>

A recent qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with persons displaced by the Marawi Siege<sup>43</sup> found that many participants had experienced acts of gender-based violence (or threats thereof), typically in public settings, including in the form of community-based violence and state-sponsored violence during the conflict. Participants also demonstrated being exposed or at risk of gender-based violence in private settings, such as personal violence in the form of altercations among family members and relatives at the evacuation centre and fights between couples and their children and other family members. The study found that gender intersected with other factors, including race, ethnicity and religion, to shape the patterns of violence experienced by displaced populations, and that the vulnerability of IDPs to gender-based violence was *“amplified by structural inequalities affecting ethnic and religious minority groups in an underserved region...that had historically received limited public attention and institutional support.”*<sup>44</sup>

However, as noted above, data on the specific protection risks and needs of displaced populations in BARMM are quite limited.

### 5.4 Legal and policy framework on IDPs

The Philippines does not have a specific law or policy on internally displaced persons (IDPs), though there have been recent attempts to introduce such legislation (see below). Despite the absence of a specific IDP law or policy, the Philippines has a range of other legal and policy instruments that are applicable to the protection and assistance of IDPs. The Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010 (RA No. 10121) is the central law governing the country’s response to disasters. The Act made it the formal responsibility of

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<sup>39</sup> Weerasinghe, S, *Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia*. 2021. UNHCR and IOM.

<sup>40</sup> Child Protection Network et al., *A Systematic Literature Review of the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in the Philippines*. UNICEF et al., Philippines, 2016, p 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Girls Not Brides, Child marriage and humanitarian contexts: Thematic brief*, August 2020, available at: [https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/959/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-contexts\\_August-2020.pdf](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/959/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-contexts_August-2020.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> <https://spotlight.licas.news/humanitarian-crisis-drives-children-in-philippines-conflict-areas-into-early-marriage/index.html>

<sup>43</sup> Veloso, D., *Safety and Security Issues, Gender-Based Violence and Militarization in Times of Armed Conflict: The Experiences of Internally Displaced People From Marawi City*. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*. 19 July 2022.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Government at national, provincial and local levels to develop policies and plans relating to all aspects of disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM), reduce underlying risk factors and prepare for effective response and early recovery.<sup>45</sup> Under this Act, the policy should include upholding constitutional rights to life and property by addressing root causes of vulnerabilities to disasters, strengthening institutional capacity for DRRM, and by building community resilience to disasters and climate change impacts.<sup>46</sup> The policy should also include adopting a holistic, comprehensive, integrated and proactive DRRM approach to lessen socioeconomic and environmental impacts of disasters including climate change, and to promote the involvement and participation of all sectors and stakeholders at all levels, especially the local community.<sup>47</sup> The DRRM Act includes one reference to conflict. It sets out a State policy to *“[m]ainstream disaster risk reduction into the peace process and conflict resolution approaches in order to minimize loss of lives and damage to property, and ensure that communities in conflict zones can immediately go back to their normal lives during periods of intermittent conflicts.”*<sup>48</sup>

The Act provides that the State must *“adhere to and adopt universal norms, principles and standards of humanitarian assistance and the global effort on risk reduction”*<sup>49</sup> and *“ensure that disaster risk reduction and climate change measures are gender responsive, sensitive to indigenous knowledge systems, and respectful of human rights.”*<sup>50</sup> The Act only includes a few provisions specifically on forced displacement. In its definition of “disaster preparedness”, the Act indicates that preparedness includes activities such as *“the development of arrangements for [...] evacuation [...] which] must be supported by formal institutional, legal and budgetary capacities.”*<sup>51</sup> The mandated functions of local authorities include recommending the *“implementation of forced or pre-emptive evacuation of local residents, if necessary.”*<sup>52</sup> Section 11(b)(3) also mandates certain institutional bodies to maintain a database of locations of critical infrastructure and capacities, including evacuation centres. In the context of responding to and managing the adverse effects of emergencies and carrying out recovery activities, local and village-level bodies are required to *“endeavor to create a special place where internally-displaced mothers can find help with breastfeeding, feed and care for their babies and give support to each other.”*<sup>53</sup>

In 2016, the Philippines introduced the Children’s Emergency Relief and Protection Act 2016 (RA No. 10821). Under this Act, a comprehensive and strategic programme of action provides children, pregnant and lactating mothers affected by disasters and other emergency situations with support and assistance for immediate recovery and protection.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof (RA 11188), is applicable to *“all children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict.”*<sup>55</sup> This Act explicitly references the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement 1998 and addresses the rights and protection of children in situations of

<sup>45</sup> Section 4, Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Section 2(a), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Section 2(d), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Section 2(i), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Section 2(b), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Section 2(j), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Section 3(j), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Section 11(3)(b), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Section 12(c)(16), Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Section 2, Children’s Emergency Relief and Protection Act 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Section 5, Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof (RA 11188).

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armed conflict, which apply to internally displaced children,<sup>56</sup> including children who have fled in the context of armed conflict and situations of generalized violence.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the Children’s Emergency Relief and Protection Act 2016 applies in disaster and other emergency situations.

It should also be noted that a range of laws are in place in the Philippines / BARMM that address child protection and other protection issues, including gender-based violence, more generally.<sup>58</sup> These laws continue to apply in the context of displacement, though they are not explicitly focused on the situation of displacement or the unique needs and challenges that arise in this context.

The absence of a specific IDP law which is compliant with international standards has created gaps in the protective framework for children and families affected by displacement, despite the provisions mentioned above in more general laws. It has been noted that *“due to this absence of an IDP law, and considering that the present DRRM Act lacks mechanisms in integrating community action into its implementation, local governments fail to fully consider IDP welfare with a long-term perspective.”*<sup>59</sup> In 2019 and 2020, four draft IDP Bills entitled “Protecting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Providing Penalties for Violations thereof and for Other Purposes” were filed before the Philippines House of Representatives, while another two versions were filed before the Philippines Senate. Efforts to reconcile these documents and to advocate for their adoption among the legislature are ongoing.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Section 5(k), Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof (RA 11188).

<sup>57</sup> Section 5(v), Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof (RA 11188).

<sup>58</sup> A detailed analysis of the child protection legal framework is outside the scope of this case study research; however, see International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society et. al. *The Responsibility to Prevent and Respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Disasters and Crises: Research Results of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Prevention and Response Before, During and After Disasters in Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines*. 2018. IFRC.

<sup>59</sup> Bermudez, R.S. et al. *Displacements in the Philippines in a Post COVID-19 World: A Recovery Focus. Refugee Survey Quarterly*.2020. 39, 602 – 608.

<sup>60</sup> Weerasinghe, S, *Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia*. 2021. UNHCR and IOM.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Drivers and profile of displacement in SPMS Box

The data demonstrates that displacement among research participants tends to be sporadic, frequent and often short-term, with displaced persons fleeing in response to (or at time pre-empting) armed conflict between Government and non-Government armed groups (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in particular). Displacement was described as quite sudden and disorganised, in which persons fleeing conflict made their own way to a safe area. Barangay captains were, however, sometimes mentioned as providing guidance during evacuations.

#### 5.1.1 Drivers and triggers of displacement

Immediate triggers for evacuation and displacement among research participants were typically observed acts or events that were read by community members as indicating that conflict was imminent or had begun, for instance, hearing gunfire, observing military trucks entering the area or drones. For example:

*“How do you prepare [to evacuate]?*  
*We don’t. There is no warning.*  
*The war is in the middle of the night.*  
*We just run if the gun fire starts.”<sup>61</sup>*

*“Sometimes, we don’t have time to prepare.*  
*If we see a drone, that’s our cue to prepare to run.*  
*With the last conflict, we didn’t have time to prepare at all.*  
*We just heard the bazooka going off, I think it was around 11pm. The people just ran.”<sup>62</sup>*

Other drivers included *rido* (clan conflicts, typically involving land or other disputes) and, occasionally, flooding, as illustrated by a key informant: *“Most of the displacement in BARMM is from human-induced disasters – armed conflict between forces of Government and the non-State armed groups, as well as clan feuds, or what we call ‘rido’ which is very rampant here in BARMM: disputes over land, political disputes, and these are from the big clans that cause displacement of a village, for instance...There’s also a certain number of municipalities that have recurring flooding because they are in catchment areas.”<sup>63</sup>*

Some participants in the FGDs explained the multiple and compounding impacts of different drivers of displacement. It has been noted that *“the combined effects of conflict and disaster complicate efforts to prevent and mitigate displacement, protect affected and displaced people and promote sustainable solutions to internal displacement.”<sup>64</sup>* According to a recent study, in Mindanao (particularly in BARMM), conflict and

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<sup>61</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>62</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), 36 – 52 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.

<sup>63</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Weerasinghe, S, Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia. 2021. UNHCR and IOM.

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conflict and natural disasters have each triggered significant displacement of persons, sometimes more than once, and this combined impact has undermined resilience of persons to both of these challenges.<sup>65</sup>

In particular, among participants in this case study, it was explained that conflict and flooding can co-occur, which creates considerable challenges evacuating quickly and finding a safe place; it is clear that conflict, flooding and constant evacuations are having a substantial impact on the ability of families to have stable and secure livelihoods, undermining their resilience to these drivers. For example, according to an FGD with adolescents:

*“For me, when the conflict and flood arise at the same time, it is very difficult for us when we have that situation. There’s a war going on and you can’t go anywhere because of the flood. It is also affecting our livelihood.*

*Same for me: my parents don’t know where to get food because we are farming, and we leave our farm when the conflict arises.*

*For me, sometimes the flood waters are too high and because of the conflict, we don’t know where to go.”<sup>66</sup>*

Poverty was identified as both a driver and a cause or consequence of regular forced displacement – persons who are poor appear most at risk of displacement, particularly in the case of natural disasters, as their houses may not be made from durable materials and they have little option but to return to their homes following a disaster, even if their homes are in low lying areas or areas otherwise prone to experiencing natural disasters. For example:

*“The majority of people here have no stable income because they are evacuating often. The life here is not stable.”<sup>67</sup>*

*“For those with no money, like us, we cannot afford to have soil in our houses to prevent the flood waters coming into our house.”<sup>68</sup>*

### 5.1.2 Resilience to frequent and routine displacement

The pattern of displacement and return among participants was described as a routine occurrence and something participants just had to ‘deal with’ as part of their everyday lives. For instance, according to a FGD with Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officers (MSWDOs): *“The conflict is sporadic. Let’s say they would stay two to three weeks in a neighbouring safe site. If they feel that the conflict has calmed down, they will go back to their homes. Sometimes, even within a day if they observed that the gunfire has stopped, they would immediately go back to their homes. They are very mobile, and the situation is very fluid.”<sup>69</sup>*

Typically, the whole community evacuates when armed conflict breaks out. As an indication of how frequent and routine evacuation tended to be among research participants, it was noted that some had built huts or

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> FGD with five adolescents, 16 – 18 years, Maguindanao PSWDO, 12 March 2022.

<sup>67</sup> IDI with adult male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>68</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>69</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

maintained tents in evacuation sites where they kept some belongings ready for when they needed to evacuate. For example, according to a group of adolescents from Sitio Dabudi, it is standard for families to have a hut outside the area to which families can evacuate when armed conflict erupts:

***“How often is there armed conflict in your area?”***

*Once a week.*

***Where do you stay?***

*We have a house in Datu Piang made of light materials [a hut]. We already have our things there, so anytime war breaks out we can go there.*

***Do people in Sitio Dabudi usually have a house also in Datu Piang?***

*Yes, but it’s just a tent, just for us to have a safe place to go if there is a situation of sudden gunfire and bombing.”<sup>70</sup>*

The challenge of living in a precarious and fluid situation was noted by participants, including the feeling of being constantly ‘on edge’ or in fear. The impacts of constant evacuations on the ability to maintain stable livelihoods was also mentioned. For example:

*“We are always evacuating. We are always on the move and on edge. If there are tensions, like if we see people who are leaving, carrying their belongings, we immediately vacate our place and go to the nearest safe place because if you don’t, you might get caught in the crossfire.”<sup>71</sup>*

*“During the night we evacuate because we are scared that anytime, the war between them [Government forces and non-Government armed groups] will start again.*

*Honestly, I am really scared because my child was hit by a stray bullet. He was barely two years old. He was hit in the legs. This is why every time I hear gunfire, I tremble in fear.*

*If I hear that the military will arrive, I will immediately evacuate my children. You can imagine the fear that I have.”<sup>72</sup>*

However, participants demonstrated strong resilience in the face of continued and regular situations of displacement. It was expressed by adolescents and parents / carers that children, in particular, had grown quite resilient to sudden and frequent evacuations. They noted how conflict-driven evacuations were part of their lives and something they were required and had learned to ‘live with.’

*“We are used to the situation already. We just run to a safe place and after the conflict we go back to our own houses. That’s our life, we are used to it already.*

*We go back to that situation; sometimes the conflict only lasts for an hour and after that, we go back to our houses...we are scared but we get used to it because we’ve grown up in this kind of environment.”<sup>73</sup>*

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<sup>70</sup> FGD with five adolescents, Datu Salibu, 13 – 16 years, 17 March 2022.

<sup>71</sup> IDI with adult male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>72</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>73</sup> FGD with five adolescents, 16 – 18 years, Maguindanao PSWDO, 12 March 2022.

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*“The people are immune to our situation, even the children. If you told the children to change clothes, they know that we are evacuating.”<sup>74</sup>*

*“If you would assess the children in the community, you will see that they are already used to and immune to the war. You would not see that they are scared. The sound of bombs and gunfire is like [as common as] a mobile ringtone to them.”<sup>75</sup>*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was reported that displacement related to natural disasters tends to be more organised and pre-emptive, compared to conflict-driven displacement. The reason for this appears to be the routine monitoring of disaster risks (e.g. water levels) and warning systems in place, which has led to more managed and pre-emptive displacements, as compared to those driven by conflict, as illustrated by a key informant: *“When it comes to natural disasters, the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office will be active in monitoring water range, floods, and they will advise their constituents to evacuate the area. In some cases, they will enforce pre-emptive evacuations or forced evacuations, but it is not the same with armed encounters. When conflict breaks out between the military and armed groups, it could just erupt in the middle of the night. People will just run for their lives.”<sup>76</sup>*

### 5.1.3 Displacement locations

When families involved in the research evacuate, they tend to stay at a nearby location (e.g. a neighbouring municipality within SPMS Box), and many will return to their homes quite quickly. According to an FGD with four Municipal SWDOs in SPMS Box, displaced persons typically stay in constructed huts in designated areas within the closest barangay they deem to be safe, for instance, behind a market place or near a barangay government building. Some also evacuate to the homes of relatives if possible:

*“At the time of a clash [armed conflict] or a natural disaster, people will just run to a safer place. If the Government has a designated evacuation centre, they will seek refuge, they will go to that evacuation centre. But in most cases, they will go to their nearby relatives that are willing to accommodate them. That will be for armed conflict, but the same is true of natural hazards. When they feel flood waters rising, they will evacuate to safer ground and after the water subsides, they will immediately return.”<sup>77</sup>*

#### **“Can you describe the evacuation location?”**

- *Me, we have put up an extension house in my relative’s place.*
- *We have a small hut with a tent as a roof.*
- *Sometimes, at our relatives.*
- *Other times in the Madrasah.*
- *In the market, sometimes beside the school we put up an improvised shelter.”<sup>78</sup>*

However, it was noted that at times, whole villages will move outside of the SPMS Box area, depending on the extent of the conflict. Typically, displacement lasts a day or two, at which point then families return to their homes. However, at times a conflict will last for several weeks and there will be a need to establish shelters.

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<sup>74</sup> IDI with adult male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>75</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>76</sup> KII with Field Associate, UNHCR, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

The Municipal SWDOs mentioned that there had been calls to construct a more permanent evacuation centre in SPMS Box. However, the challenge would be locating the centre far enough away from conflict-affected areas, but close enough to be a viable option for persons fleeing conflict.

While much of the displacement in SPMS Box is temporary and routine, there were instances of more longer-term displacement among some participants. Some families had been unable to return to their homes, at least in the short term, due to destruction of their properties; or because some areas were under military occupation for an extended period, and families were unable to re-enter due to the security situation. Participants in this situation expressed the challenges they faced in terms of loss of homes and loss of livelihoods, and having to make significant adjustments to living longer term in evacuation areas. For example:

*“It was hard because we lost our homes.*

*It was hard to adjust in the evacuation area. First, you have left your livelihood. Second, the life you are used to suddenly becomes very different.*

*We are new to the place so it’s a new adjustment or us.*

*It’s hard to have no permanent home.”<sup>79</sup>*

For those participants living longer term in evacuation sites, living conditions were reported to be quite challenging, for example:

***“What do you find the most challenging in your situation [in an evacuation centre]?”***

*No food.*

*No decent place to sleep.*

*It’s hard to sleep in the evacuation site – it’s cramped.*

*It’s noisy.”<sup>80</sup>*

#### **5.1.4 Circumstances and challenges of return from displacement**

Livelihoods appear to be very attached to the lands and homes of the participants, and this appears to limit their ability to move too far from their homes and to stay away for prolonged periods of time. Participants who are farmers tended to express that their livelihoods are tightly attached to lands they hold. Other participants noted that the raw materials they use to produce goods in order to generate an income (e.g. materials for mat weaving) are only available at their homes, restricting their ability to evacuate in the longer term and reducing the distance they are able to travel. This can mean that displaced persons return quite quickly to their homes, as they are unable to generate livelihoods without being able to tend crops and livestock on their land. Participants tended to express that, despite the risks of returning home, it was necessary for them to do so:

*“As a farmer, we lost our livelihoods and our properties. We have nothing left and that is why, even if it’s risky, we still go back to our farm so we can have our livelihoods.”<sup>81</sup>*

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<sup>79</sup> FGD with 10 adults (including 6 parents), 18 – 37 years, Datu Saudi, 18 March 2022.

<sup>80</sup> FGD with five adolescents, 15 – 17 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>81</sup> IDI with adult male, 72 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

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*“When they are in the evacuation area, they don’t have an income. That is why, even if the soldiers warn them not to go home, they are still forced to go back, so that their family can eat.”<sup>82</sup>*

*“We do not evacuate [long term] even when there is a war because our livelihood is here. That is where we get our materials for mat weaving. We have vegetables on our farms. We also get ‘suso’ or seashells if there is nothing to eat.”<sup>83</sup>*

In FGDs with adolescents, participants also relayed how it was extremely difficult not to return quickly to their homes, given that their livelihoods were so closely tied to their farmlands. For example:

***“You said earlier that in [participant’s home] there are armed conflicts and floods. Why don’t you leave?***  
*Because our source of income is in that area. If we leave, we have no source of income...our life is here, it’s hard to move to a new place. We are used to the armed conflicts.”<sup>84</sup>*

Also, some participants mentioned accruing debts to buy materials to produce crops, for instance, purchasing fertilisers and other farm goods and having to evacuate shortly before or during a harvest. In this case, there is a need to ensure crops are produced so families can pay off debts.

It was mentioned by some FGD participants and service providers that at times, families will live within an evacuation area, but return every day to their homes to farm, at times risking quite difficult security situations. For instance, according to Municipal SWDOs:

*“IDP testimonies are that they are there [in the evacuation centre] during the day, they would go back to their homes to farm and at night they would go back to the displacement site...usually if you visit during the day, you will see only a few of them in the evacuation site since they go back to their homes and in the afternoon, about 3 or 4pm, they would go back to the evacuation site since the conflict usually happens at night.”<sup>85</sup>*

This indicates the limited mobility of participants (in the sense that they need to stay close to their homes), given the connection to their homes for their livelihoods.

Also, some participants expressed that they did not want to impose on already stretched relatives / friends, and this limited the ability for them to stay away from home for extended periods. For example:

*“The people will take us in, but I think of the inconvenience we are causing them, because our family is big. Sometimes your children would cry, and their children were also crying. You cannot bring them out of the tent because the area is also flooded. Also, the place is not comfortable since it’s just a tent, and the houses are only made of wood.”<sup>86</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), 36 – 52 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.

<sup>83</sup> FGD with five parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>84</sup> FGD with five adolescents, 13 – 17 years, Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>85</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>86</sup> IDI with adult male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

## 5.2 Protection risks and challenges facing displaced populations in SPMS Box

Conflict-related displacement was understood by research participants as driving a range of direct and indirect protection risks.

### 6.1.1 Exposure to and impacts of conflict

The direct impacts of armed conflict were mentioned by stakeholders, adolescents and parents as being a considerable risk to children, who are constantly exposed to injury and even death by being caught up in armed conflict. It also appears that poverty and limited economic opportunities compounds these direct protection risks. For instance, some participants noted that residents had been killed or injured going into 'red alert' areas to tend to crops, which demonstrates the extreme vulnerability caused by the limited access to livelihoods of displaced families.

Constant / recurring conflict can also have the effect of normalising violence in communities, which can expose children to a higher risk of violence both in the community and at home, as illustrated in the FGD with Municipal SWDOs. *"It's like part of the culture sometimes in Maguindanao...one time, I saw a child that was three years old and he was holding a bolo [machete]. For him, it's just a toy. If we see a five year old holding a bolo, we are terrified. For them, in the community, it's normal. Also, the verbal language, like shouting and using words that for us is not normal...but for them, it's normal. They are not gentle because they are used to being strong."*<sup>87</sup> The normalisation of conflict and violence may also be a driver of children being recruited into armed groups (see below).

The constant presence of conflict and routine displacement indirectly drives protection risks as it disrupts the protective environment for children, impacting on the ability for parents / carers to meet the needs of their children. It also impacts negatively on the broader systems of protection for children, disrupting their access to schools, health clinics and social welfare programmes. Stakeholders who participated in KIIs tended to mention the psychological impact of living in areas affected by armed conflict and being subjected to constant and sudden conflict forcing evacuations, and the disruptions to life that this caused. For children, disrupted schooling was mentioned as impacting negatively on children's social development and psychological outcomes.

### 6.1.2 Family separation

Research participants tended to mention cases in which evacuations happened quickly and unexpectedly, and in the process of moving, children were at times left behind or became separated from their parents, as illustrated by the following statements from FGDs with parents / carers and adolescents:

*"The other night, we evacuated. My neighbour had already locked their home and moved. When they went back, that's when they found out they had left one child behind...The child that was left was sleeping the whole time. It lasted around three hours of guns firing...my two year old child got separated from us. It was Ramadan. I could not contact them because they don't have a mobile phone. I learned about their whereabouts late in the afternoon, that they were staying with my brother."*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>88</sup> IDI with adult male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

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*“P1: I got separated from my parents due to the chaos. I saw a group of people running, so I joined them. That time, my parents and siblings were not home. We saw my parents and siblings when we were already in the Madrasah [school used as an evacuation centre].*

*P2: My sibling was separated from us. He was 10 years old. He got left while taking a bath in the river...we looked for him and someone told us where he was.*

*P3: ...there is no warning when the war starts, so we get separated when trying to look for a hiding place or safe place.”<sup>89</sup>*

In these cases, children are typically only separated temporarily - often only for a few hours - and they are usually taken in by a relative or neighbour. Perhaps due to their short-term nature, these separations do not tend to be picked up in more formal monitoring systems, such as the Joint Child Protection / Gender-Based Violence Working Group. As illustrated above, children tend to be reunited through the efforts of extended family and community members. The separation of children from their parents / carers – particularly very young children – in the course of sudden and disorganised evacuations are a cause for concern, even if the separation is short-term. Separation can cause considerable trauma for children and can at times lead to other child protection concerns, as children are removed from their protective support network.

### 6.1.3 Child marriage

Child marriage has been identified as a wide-spread practice among families in BARMM more generally. There are a number of drivers of child marriage in BARMM: poverty, allied with large families, means that the income of the family is often insufficient to support and educate the children, and marriage ‘out’ of a family is seen as a desirable option.<sup>90</sup> Also, as noted by Philippine Senator Risa Hontiveros, while poverty is a driver of child marriage, “*child marriage is part of social norms in communities where it is common is often the result of entrenched gender inequality.*”<sup>91</sup> In particular, social norms that heavily stigmatise sexual activity outside of marriage and police the sexuality of (unmarried) adolescent girls appears to be a key driver of child marriage, even in cases involving sexual violence; cases of sexual violence may lead to *ridos* or clan feuds if the marriage of the child is refused.<sup>92</sup> There also appears to be different understandings of childhood and ideas about the indicators of being ready for marriage, which does not necessarily connect to a discrete age; due to prevailing social and cultural norms, girls may be considered ready for marriage when they begin menstruating. Though other factors, such as families feeling a girl is socially and mentally ready for marriage, are also relevant to decisions surrounding marriage and marriage ages.<sup>93</sup>

As indicated above, it has been found that conflict and displacement can exacerbate drivers of child marriage, heightening the risk of displaced children to child marriage. For instance, drivers of child marriage such as limited access to education and economic opportunities and economic distress of parents are exacerbated by displacement. This was noted by research participants:

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<sup>89</sup> FGD with five adolescents, 13 – 17 years, Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>90</sup> Save the Children. Child Rights Situational Analysis in ARMM. 2016, p. 79.

<sup>91</sup> See [http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press\\_release/2020/0305\\_hontiveros2.asp](http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2020/0305_hontiveros2.asp).

<sup>92</sup> Coram International, Review of Social Services Programmes, Child Protection and Child Justice Systems and Social Services Workforce in BARMM. 2022. Unpublished study.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

*“Where life becomes hard during emergencies, especially for the caregivers to provide for the needs of children, there are negative coping mechanisms and one of these is to marry children to older men, so the family will no longer have to meet the needs of the child.”<sup>94</sup>*

*“What I noticed is that there’s an increase in early marriage by young women, as young as 14 years old, from the evacuation.*

*Because of the conflict, they cannot go to school.*

*Some of the parents don’t know how to help their children doing their module [remote learning], so they opt to stop schooling.”<sup>95</sup>*

In addition to compounding general drivers of child marriage, displacement was found in a recent study to be associated with *“less parental guidance and greater chances of adolescent social interactions and sexual relationships that are usually strictly restricted.”* Data also indicated that the climate of increasing insecurity drove parents to marry their children to *“protect family honour, consolidate political power and resources, or in gratitude for receiving shelter.”<sup>96</sup>* Thus, pressures to adhere to cultural and social norms that control and limit the sexuality of adolescents (girls in particular) appear to be compounded in situations of displacement and insecurity.

#### **6.1.4 Child labour and exploitation**

According to key experts and adolescent and parent / carer research participants, children in displacement may be drawn into child labour – at times in hazardous contexts – given the disruption to their parents’ / family’s livelihoods caused by the displacement. Participants tended to stress that parents did not consider it desirable for their children to be working, but that they at times had little option due to disruptions to their usual livelihoods. For example:

*“We know that in displacement, the economic activities of caregivers have been disrupted, and the children will be forced to engage in labour that does not suit their capacity as children.”<sup>97</sup>*

*“Children who sell street food are out until 7pm or 8pm. They are prone to risks. They work because they see their parents having a hard time providing for the family. The parents should have capital for their businesses, but the problem is how will they sustain their business if they evacuate often.”<sup>98</sup>*

##### **“Are there children who work?”**

*Yes, some help in farming and some are drivers.*

*We cannot blame them, since they need to provide for their family. We know that it is not allowed to let them work, but we don’t have a choice.”<sup>99</sup>*

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<sup>94</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>95</sup> KII with five parents / carers, 37 – 52 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Plan International and Women’s Refugee Commission, *Our voices, Our future: Understanding risks and adaptive capacities to prevent and respond to child marriage in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)*, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>98</sup> KII with teacher and former camp coordinator, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>99</sup> FGD with five parents / carers, 36 – 52 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.

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The use of children to transport illegal drugs was mentioned by the four Municipal SWDOs:

*“Most of the children in conflict with the law that I have interviewed are related to drugs; because they [criminal groups] use the minors to transport the drugs...they use them as transporter and for distraction because they know that the government cannot file a case against a minor.”<sup>100</sup>*

The pull into labour also appears to have created a child trafficking risk, with vulnerable children – particularly adolescent girls – drawn into the country’s Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) system, potentially exposing them to exploitative overseas work. The OFW system is restricted to those aged over 18 years; however, it was noted by key experts that children will at times forge identity documents to meet age requirements:

*“Due to poverty, displacement and recently due to the pandemic, the rate of women going abroad has increased. Even minors, they just tamper with their documents so they can go abroad and work as an OFW [Overseas Filipino Worker]...so we have a lot of minor women being referred to us to locate their family for family reintegration because we have a lot of cases in the shelter that were intercepted in the airport, since they were found to be minors.”<sup>101</sup>*

Among research participants, child labour tended to be associated with boys, while exposure to trafficking was associated with women and girls.

### 6.1.5 Recruitment into armed groups

It was noted by key informants that children in evacuation centres – particularly boys – are exposed to the risk of recruitment by armed groups, through being in an unstable situation in which they may be experiencing a sense of resentment toward Government armed forces who they see as responsible for their situation of displacement. For example, as illustrated by one key informant:

*“Depending on where the evacuation centre is located, there is a risk of recruitment of youth into armed groups. The recruiters will really take advantage of children in these places. People have less trust in the government forces because they think that the government harassing the armed forces is what causes the displacement, and this becomes an opportunity for armed groups to recruit youth and to radicalise out of school children, adolescents and young people.”<sup>102</sup>*

Specific cases were mentioned in a FGD with four Municipal SWOs, including a child in conflict with the law who had been recruited by an armed group to carry and hide weapons. One concerning case involved a boy who appeared to have a disability being asked to throw dynamite into an army base in exchange for cash (100 Pesos). The child – who was later arrested – had reportedly thought the explosive was a rock.<sup>103</sup>

Research participants tended to express child recruitment by armed groups as a ‘choice’ and reported that children are not forced to join armed groups. Instead, their involvement was understood as an expression of their agency, driven by various factors including the wish to pursue revenge for actions of the Government’s

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<sup>100</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>101</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>102</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>103</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

armed forces. Having relatives involved in an armed group was also considered by respondents as a driver of involvement in armed groups by children.

### 6.1.6 Violence, exploitation and abuse

Key informants mentioned that children – particularly girls – residing in evacuation centres, which tend to be overcrowded, are at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, sometimes triggered by the lack of child- and family-friendly spaces and facilities. For example: *“In most cases, they [toilets] are not segregated, there is a lack of privacy at the evacuation centres, and children are more vulnerable to male peeping and to abuse and exploitation.”*<sup>104</sup>

It was also noted by key informants that the context of displacement can exacerbate instances of family violence. While family violence is driven by a complex interplay of structural and underlying factors, the more immediate triggers, including income distress, and emotional stress, can be compounded by displacement, contributing to an increased risk of exposure to family violence. For example: *“Sometimes parents quarrel because of the problems caused by displacement. They have no money, no food to eat, they are stressed and may abuse their children physically, emotionally, psychologically.”*<sup>105</sup> The ‘normalisation’ of corporal punishment also appears to be a driver of family violence and a barrier to help seeking (see section 4.4 for a more detailed discussion).

In FGDs with parents / carers and adolescents, there tended to be either a lack of recognition that sexual violence occurs within their communities, and / or participants were not willing to speak about sexual violence (which indicates that it is quite taboo). This ‘culture of silence’ surrounding sexual violence has implications for how it is addressed and greatly reduces the ability for victims / survivors to access justice, service and support (see section 4.4 for a more detailed discussion).

## 5.3 Systems and services for children and families in displacement

The Bangsamoro Organic Law 2018 enshrines the rights of children and the duty of the Bangsamoro Government to protect children from harm.<sup>106</sup> BARMM’s Ministry for Social Services and Development (MSSD) has the mandate for leading the delivery of social welfare and child protection services at the regional, provincial, and municipal levels in both development and humanitarian contexts. The Regional Coordinator for the Council for the Welfare of the Child (CWC) supports the MSSD and provides technical assistance at regional and municipal levels on the implementation of social welfare programmes and services in BARMM.

Social welfare services are largely delivered through five welfare programmes established in 1991 by the national office of the national Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Under the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao 2018, social services, social welfare and charities now fall under the authority of BARMM rather than the national government. The five programmes are delivered as part of the mandate of MSSD.

The Social Service Regular Programme is comprised of five programmes, the most relevant of which are:

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<sup>104</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

<sup>105</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Section 14, Article IX, Bangsamoro Organic Law 2018.

- The Child and Youth Welfare Programme, under which the MSSD implements services and activities for the care, protection, participation and rehabilitation of children and youth in difficult situations and ensures social adjustment, growth and development in response to their needs;
- The Family and Community Welfare Programme, which is designed to assist disadvantaged families and socially disadvantaged communities to develop their capability to define their needs and formulate solutions to bring about desired social changes, as well as setting up viable community structures which bring about desired social change. Likewise, the programme aims to improve the capacity of parents to raise their children and improve family relationships; and
- MSSD provides comprehensive emergency assistance to displaced families to address life-saving needs. One of the components of its comprehensive disaster risk reduction and emergency programme is its Emergency Assistance Programme. Under this Programme, MSSD provides life-saving assistance to families affected by (a) natural and human-induced disasters; (b) the Covid-19 Pandemic, including the laid-off workers, informal sector, locally stranded individuals, and returning Filipinos; and (c) poor and disadvantaged households and individuals living in survival status/ below the poverty line or who are in distress, subject to the assessment by the Ministry's social workers. MSSD distributed goods and supplies, including food packs (with a standard package of 25 kg. of rice), sleeping kits, dignity kits, hygiene kits, and family disaster risk reduction / protection kits, as well as essential "pabaon" packages (for recovery after displacement).

There are also a range of other government led social service programmes operating in BARMM, including the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino (Cash Transfer Programme) (4Ps) and the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. These services are implemented by MSSD with funding and technical support from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

At the local government (LGU) level, the 2018 ruling of the Supreme Court in Mandanas in relation to budget decentralisation will change the political landscape for child protection, devolving a greater level of responsibility on local government.<sup>107</sup> This was a cause for concern for some key stakeholders, who noted the difficulties implementing social welfare and child protection programmes at the LGU level, due to lack of social workers, related technical capacities and resources. This was noted in the FGD with Municipal SWOs, who expressed frustration at the lack of capacity for LGUs to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of displaced populations, and the implications of this for their work:

*“We are getting tired of IDPs; it has been a recurrent problem for the longest time.*

*It is very stressful.*

*Especially if your LGU is not supportive of your programmes, it is very frustrating.*

*Based on the law, within 72 hours of an incident, the LGU should be the first responder, but if we wait for them, nothing will happen.*

*Given that the LGU should provide assistance to the IDPs, we wait on how long the IDPs are in their LGU. If the aid they provide is enough, we will not interrupt, but if their resources are not enough, that is when we will step in. But what is happening is we and the NGOs are the first to respond and provide assistance to the IDPs instead of them and they do nothing.”<sup>108</sup>*

<sup>107</sup> The World Bank, Philippines: Mandanas Ruling provides opportunities for improving service delivery through enhanced decentralization, June 10, 2021. Available at [Philippines World Bank](#).

<sup>108</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2021.

There are also a range of NGOs who provide humanitarian response and development programmes which support displaced populations and those at risk of displacement.

In terms of specific responses to conflict and conflict-driven displacement, the MSSD Co-Chairs (together with UNICEF and UNFPA) the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Working Group, which is a coordination forum that meets regularly, with special meetings convened in the event of an emergency. According to the FGD with NGO and CSO representatives, this Working Group was recently involved in establishing a referral pathway in order to respond to and provide effective services in child protection cases, for instance, through deciding on the appropriate organisation / service provider to which the case should be referred.<sup>109</sup> In particular, the referral pathway aims to link community-based responders (e.g. barangays, faith-based and community leaders) to the Working Group, which can then decide an appropriate action for child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) case referrals, particularly those occurring in emergency contexts.<sup>110</sup> However, the referral pathway is currently only being used by a limited number of municipalities in Maguindanao, though this includes several in SPMS Box.<sup>111</sup> However, according to the NGO and CSO representatives, there is a crucial need to capacitate key persons who would be in a position to identify and refer cases (e.g., Women and Children Desks in the National Police Force, focal persons for child protection in barangays and municipalities) and raise awareness of child protection risks, gender based violence and how to respond to and refer cases.<sup>112</sup>

### 5.3.1 Barriers and bottlenecks to effective service delivery

Key informants who participated in the study identified a range of barriers and bottlenecks to the effective delivery of protection services to children and families in displacement. Some of these challenges were specific to working within the emergency and displacement context, though other more general and systemic challenges were also explored. These more general challenges were comprehensively examined within the context of a broader assessment of child protection and social welfare systems assessment being carried out by the authors in parallel to this case study.<sup>113</sup> While a thorough examination of the gaps and challenges in protection systems in services in BARMM more generally is outside the scope of this case study, it is worth briefly mentioning some of these challenges, as they also limit the operation and effectiveness of protection systems and services to children and families at risk of displacement.

Gaps and challenges within the child protection system are underpinned by a lack of policy direction, with no overarching policy or coordination mechanism to guide the development of child protection systems and services. There is also a lack of instruments to operationalise the system, including a comprehensive law, regulations or operational guidance setting out the mandates and functions of different bodies, and establishing comprehensive child protection mandates and accountabilities. Also, child protection structures at the sub-regional level in BARMM are severely under-capacitated, and there is a heavy reliance on NGOs to deliver services. There are a very limited number of Social Welfare Officers, particularly at LGU level. Case management systems and child protection services (particularly prevention services) are very limited. Participants mentioned that, given the capacity challenges in the Government system, often, child protection

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<sup>109</sup> FGD with five NGOs / CSOs, Cotabato City, 17 March 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Can we add a reference to this, once completed?

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cases will be reported directly to NGOs or CSOs,<sup>114</sup> which detaches these cases from Government frameworks and accountabilities. Access to the child protection system appears to be a big challenge: cases that are typically picked up by the system (according to available administrative data) are children who have been abandoned or are without parental supervision, with extremely limited identification of cases involving violence, abuse and neglect.<sup>115</sup>

These challenges appear to be heightened and have particularly profound impacts in the context of displacement in SPMS Box. Given the limited number of SWOs, it was reported by key informants that they tend to be deployed solely to deliver food and other material assistance, with very limited focus on programmes aimed at preventing violence, exploitation and abuse, identifying and responding to protection risks and addressing the psycho-social needs of children and families.

*“During emergencies, the response focus is on the distribution of food and water, but not really on the protection side of things, like monitoring of child protection cases. The social welfare workforce is being stretched for food distribution, which actually should not be their focus, because they are social workers. They should be monitoring unaccompanied children, separated children. But because of the limited human resources, they are being stretched because there are so many IDPs who need food distribution.”<sup>116</sup>*

Given these limitations, it is perhaps unsurprising that (I)NGOs have attempted to fill these gaps by providing particular protection services to children in displacement:

*“The Government social welfare officers have their own response – it is common that responses focus on food assistance or cash assistance, rehabilitation or livelihood assistance. However, most of the child protection responses come from humanitarian organisations, including building child friendly spaces, temporary learning centres, monitoring of the nutrition of children.”<sup>117</sup>*

Also, it was noted that, at times when whole communities need to evacuate, systems and services are disrupted because local level service providers are also in displacement, limiting their ability to provide stable service delivery. *“The service providers like the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children, for instance, are also victims of displacement themselves in emergencies and may no longer be able to function as service providers. This way, the emergencies cause additional risks to children.”<sup>118</sup>*

According to Municipal SWOs involved in the research, the constant displacement of children and families causes considerable disruption to child protection programmes, as children and families enrolled in programmes (parenting sessions, case management etc.) are constantly needing to evacuate, limiting their ability to engage in these programmes, and impacting on the programme’s continuity: *“Sometimes, when you are only just starting with a planned activity, it will be cut short if there is an [armed] encounter; people will hide and evacuate in different places that feel safe and you would wait for them to come back to continue with*

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<sup>114</sup> FGD with five NGOs / CSOs, Cotabato City, 17 March 2022.

<sup>115</sup> Coram International, Review of Social Services Programmes, Child Protection and Child Justice Systems and Social Services Workforce in BARMM. 2022. Unpublished study.

<sup>116</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>117</sup> KII with Field Officer, UNHCR, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.

<sup>118</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

*your planned activity. The activities become fragmented and sometimes you will get a different participant since some of the participants do not return to the area.*<sup>119</sup>

Key stakeholders also mentioned a number of practical challenges in delivering protection and other services in the context of displacement in SPMS Box, which is characterised – as explored above – by sudden and disorganised evacuations of persons in very insecure circumstances. For instance, it is reported to be a challenge to effectively identify displaced children and families, particularly where persons reside with extended families, rather than in evacuation sites. Gaining physical access to areas, given the security context, was also reported to be challenging.

*“The challenge is that people are everywhere, so the geographic scope of the response is everywhere. And you’re being hampered because of the ongoing armed conflict, which is just in the vicinity...For a natural disaster there are no issues in terms of security. Access to areas could be limited in conflicts – hampers disaster response.”*<sup>120</sup>

*“Most of the IDPs are not staying in the evacuation centres; some are staying at their relatives, they are in home-based settings. That is quite challenging for humanitarian actors, including government duty bearers, because they are difficult to track and hard to reach. In terms of getting comprehensive information about children in home-based settings, it is quite challenging.”*<sup>121</sup>

It was also reported to be difficult identifying displaced children in communities in which BIFF members are quite integrated. In these contexts, it is difficult to distinguish BIFF members from community members for the purposes of delivering social welfare services.

SWOs face challenges in ensuring they are able to spend sufficient time in conflict affected areas in order to effectively distribute humanitarian assistance, given the volatile security context: *“The transportation and the distance to the area is hard. Then we need to prepare the goods and distribute them. The soldier even scolded me, and they said I am not time conscious. What can I do? The area is too far away. If I can, I try to distribute the goods as early as possible, but we have a challenge with the transportation and location of the area. Also, I can’t just leave the goods because we don’t have a warehouse in the area.”*<sup>122</sup>

Service delivery was also reported to be complicated by the corruption of processes by political interests. For example, in one FGD with service providers, a participant mentioned that family members of LGU representatives try to ensure they are ‘first on the list’ for humanitarian assistance. However, there are now established guidelines to guide the distribution of humanitarian assistance, and this alleviates challenges faced by SWOs in negotiating distribution with LGUs who attempt to corrupt the process.

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<sup>119</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2022.

<sup>120</sup> KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>121</sup> KII with Field Associate, UNHCR, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.

<sup>122</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2022.

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## 5.4 Access to protection systems and services for children and families in displacement

The data demonstrates that research participants do not tend to access more formal child protection systems, though social welfare services (food distribution, shelters etc.) were accessed. Research respondents explained that they rely heavily on informal community support networks, including extended family and neighbours, to provide food and material support (in addition to any humanitarian assistance provided by MSSD). Community members also support each other in caring for and reuniting children who get separated from parents during sudden onset evacuations. For example:

*“We help each other as a community. We guide each other on where to go and where not to go. We now have a rescue car, so when we evacuate those that are unattended or get separated, we pick them up. If our children are lost, we let our neighbours know so that they can tell us where to find them or how our children can find us.”<sup>123</sup>*

*“We help each other. If there’s extra food, we share it with other families. We share food. Sometimes, we ask our neighbour to tend to our children if we have to go somewhere. We support each other. We are like a family.”<sup>124</sup>*

In order to seek help and support for violence, abuse and exploitation, research participants tended to report relying on family, friends or community members, though at times, community leaders were mentioned. The FGDs with parents / carers and adolescents included several scenario-based questions in which participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario involving a child protection risk and asked what the child / family could and should do in the situation. One of the scenarios involved a displaced child who was experiencing physical violence in the home being perpetrated by a father who abused alcohol. The responses demonstrate the importance of Barangay leaders and other community and religious leaders within community-based child protection responses. Participants tended to suggest that the matter would need to be resolved within the family or community; however, they also tended to report (often in response to probing) that the child could seek advice from the Barangay Captain (or Barangay Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) Focal Person, if there is one in place), or much less frequently, from the DSWD or MSSD.

For example:

*“What action could Aisha [the child exposed to physical violence in the family] take?  
I would talk to her father and say stop drinking, because he is hurting his child.  
I would do the same.  
I would advise Aisha to be patient, since all problems have a solution.  
I would tell the father to stop drinking.  
I would talk to the father and ask him to stop hurting Aisha.”<sup>125</sup>*

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<sup>123</sup> FGD with 5 parents / carers (females), Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>124</sup> FGD with 10 adults (including 6 parents / carers), 18 – 37 years, Datu Saudi, 18 March 2022.

<sup>125</sup> FGD with 5 adolescents, 15 – 17 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

In response to another scenario involving neglect (including inadequate supervision of young children and neglect of material needs), participants tended to report that the child could seek help from the Barangay Captain to get food, and several mentioned the DSWD and MSSD, indicating that the DSWD and MSSD are associated with the provision of material support or that their role is associated more with responding to children who are being neglected by parents, rather than those experiencing family violence. For example:

*“What would you do to help the parents and children?”*

*For me, the shelter. First, they should be in a shelter if parents can no longer give support; the children can be taken to DSWD.*

*They should be counselled to provide what help they need and to remove them to that place where they don't belong.*

*Provide them with food.*

*Refer them to the Barangay.*

*Talk to their parents and tell them not to neglect their children.”<sup>126</sup>*

*“I would give them food so they would not roam around.*

*Talk to the parents and ask them to take care of their child.*

*I would tell the parents to take care of their child.*

*We can reach out to the Barangay Captain.*

*Also, I'd ask the MSSD for help.”<sup>127</sup>*

Participants did not tend to mention police at all and only very rarely mentioned Municipal SWDOs, indicating that more formal child protection structures are not considered appropriate, at least in terms of responding to family violence; it could also indicate that these institutions are not as visible or accessible to children in displacement, particularly in more remote locations that are not close to MSSD or Police offices.

### **Barriers to accessing protection systems and services**

The data suggest a number of barriers to accessing more formal protection systems and services. One barrier appears to be social and cultural beliefs and practices surrounding family and sexual violence. The FGDs with adolescents and parents / carers demonstrated that violence within the family does not tend to be seen as a child protection risk. In particular, it appears that corporal punishment is quite normalised among research participants. For example, according to an FGD with adolescents:

*“It's normal for the parents to fight sometimes, but it does not result in killing. Sometimes there's a physical altercation.*

*It's part of life of parents and families – sometimes they fight.*

*Does it also happen to children?*

*Yes, it does.*

*But it's just part of disciplining the children, but only to a point.”<sup>128</sup>*

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<sup>126</sup> FGD with 5 adolescents, 16 – 18 years, Maguindanao PSWDO, 12 March 2022.

<sup>127</sup> FGD with 5 adolescents, 15 – 17 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

<sup>128</sup> KII with 5 adolescents, 16 – 18 years, Maguindanao PSWDO, 12 March 2022.

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*“There are those being reprimanded and beaten by their parents, but it’s just a form of disciplining the hard-headed children.”<sup>129</sup>*

Sexual violence appears to be heavily stigmatised, and fears of bring shame on the family and / or of reprisal appears to tightly restrict the ability for children and families to report cases of sexual violence and seek help. Stakeholders noted the culture of silence that continues to surround sexual violence in BARMM as being both an enabling factor of abuse and a barrier to help seeking. For example:

*“For a Muslim community, for BARMM, they are not open to discussing [sexual violence]. The culture of silence exists...they don’t want to be involved in that issue because it could lead to a more complicated situation. It could even lead to a feud.”<sup>130</sup>*

In these cases, given the stigma surrounding sexual violence, key stakeholders reported that the use of mediation and family or community resolution mechanisms were ways of ‘settling’ the matter and avoiding social complications, thereby limiting the ability of victims and survivors to access justice systems and protection services, and other forms of support, including psycho-social support. In settling cases of sexual violence, several key informants explained that this could result in a victim being forced to marry her perpetrator:

*“Even where there are mandated agencies we can refer cases to, and who are mandated to respond, cases are being settled at the family level...for example, gender-based violence is seen as a stigma, they don’t talk about it, they don’t talk about being abused. For them, it is better to marry their child to the perpetrator than tell the world she was raped.”<sup>131</sup>*

Access to justice and protection systems were reported to be particularly difficult where perpetrators are well known and / or in a position of authority in the community. For example, during an FGD with Municipal SWOs, participants mentioned particular cases in which an act of rape was ‘settled’ within the community:

*“They were scared because the police visited them. The perpetrator was a nephew of the mayor. They were threatened so they opted to settle. I handled a similar case. At the outset it was a theft incident, but in the process of the interview, the minor confessed that there was also a rape incident – her uncle raped her when she was with him two or three years ago. It was amicable settled. So, I cannot pursue the case since it was settled within the family, but I did not agree for the child to go back to the family since the perpetrator was a relative”<sup>132</sup>*  
(The child was sent to live with her aunty and attend boarding school).

Other practical barriers were mentioned by respondents to accessing protection systems and services, for instance that support often arrives too late:

*“The Mayor will sometimes provide assistance, but it’s a long process before we can get the relief. ...The armed conflict will be over before we get the relief.”*

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<sup>129</sup> FGD with 5 adolescents, 13 – 16 years, Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>130</sup> KII with Field Associate, UNHCR, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.

<sup>131</sup> FGD with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.

<sup>132</sup> FGD with four MSWDOs in SPMS Box, 12 March 2022.

*There is support from MSSD, but it's too late.*<sup>133</sup>

Stakeholders also mentioned that children and families may not be aware of where to report child protection concerns.

## 5.5 Impact of Covid-19 and containment measures on displaced populations

The challenges facing internally displaced persons were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the substantial restrictions<sup>134</sup> imposed by the Philippines Government to contain the spread of the virus. Displaced communities experienced movement restrictions but without robust protective mechanisms in place in their camps and evacuation centres.<sup>135</sup> Poor conditions in camps – which often lack the space for physical distancing and proper partitions to isolate Covid-positive persons – made it difficult for displaced persons to avoid infection.<sup>136</sup> Also, the impact of Covid-related restrictions on livelihoods are likely to have been particularly acute for displaced persons, who already suffer disruptions to work and income streams. It has been noted that the national and local support programmes did not include IDPs as a vulnerable group of persons in implementation of their amelioration programme.<sup>137</sup> This – and the general lack of policy for IDP protection (see section 3.3) – *“meant exposing displaced communities to the harms of the pandemic, and moving forward, leaving IDPs out of the recovery agenda to be instituted by the government at the national and local levels.”*<sup>138</sup>

Adolescent and parent / carer research participants mentioned the impact that Covid-19 had on their livelihoods, for instance, in restricting the ability for parents and carers to sell farm produce at the markets, further compounding the negative impacts of displacement.

*“It has greatly affected us in everything. You cannot go out if you are not vaccinated.*

*You can't go to school and have a face-to-face class.*

*If you have brothers and sisters in different places, we cannot visit them. Visitation is not allowed.”*<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> FGD with 5 parents / carers, 36 – 52 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.

<sup>134</sup> In February 2020, President Duterte declared a state of public emergency in the country (Proclamation No. 922), and a series of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) orders were made, which resulted in a total (strict) lockdown. By 16 March 2020, the President signed a proclamation (Proclamation No. 929) placing the country under a state of calamity due to Covid-19 for six months. Under this strict form of lockdown, residents were required to stay indoors unless they could produce a pass that enables them to go out and buy essential items. Since then and until lockdowns were lifted in April 2022, a series of quarantine orders of varying severity were rolled out across the country: see Atienza, M.E, University of the Philippines. Emergency Powers and Covid-19: Philippines as a Case Study. University of Melbourne Forum on Constitution Building. Available at:

[https://law.unimelb.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/3474344/MF20-Web1-Philippines-Ela-FINAL.pdf](https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3474344/MF20-Web1-Philippines-Ela-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>135</sup> Bermudez, R.S. et al. Displacements in the Philippines in a Post COVID-19 World: A Recovery Focus. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*.2020. 39, 602 – 608.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD), Memorandum Circular No. 4 Series of 2020. Special Guidelines on the Provision of Social Amelioration Program, available at: [https://www.dswd.gov.ph/issuances/MCs/MC\\_2020-004.pdf](https://www.dswd.gov.ph/issuances/MCs/MC_2020-004.pdf), cited in Bermudez, R.S. et al. Displacements in the Philippines in a Post COVID-19 World: A Recovery Focus. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*.2020. 39, 602 – 608.

<sup>138</sup> Bermudez, R.S. et al. Displacements in the Philippines in a Post COVID-19 World: A Recovery Focus. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*.2020. 39, 602 – 608.

<sup>139</sup> FGD with 2 adolescents, 14 and 18 years, and 2 parents / carers, 52 and 65 years, Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

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*“Our business was greatly affected. For example, we have products to be sold in Cotabato City; it was not easy to transport the products from our place to another place.”<sup>140</sup>*

***“How were you affected by the pandemic?”***

*It became more challenging – we can’t go out to sell goods and work*

*We were really affected by the pandemic. Before, we can still go out and sell and help; now we can’t go out. We can no longer help our family.*

*We are very dependent on help and assistance (ayuda).*

*If there is no ayuda, we cannot eat, because we have nothing in the evacuation site.*

*Sometimes, we go to high risk areas just to get some crops and anything we can have for food and to sell.”<sup>141</sup>*

Children and parent / carer participants also routinely explained that Covid-19 had disrupted their (or their child’s) ability to access education. While online education materials (modules) were provided, it was difficult for children to rely on parents / carers to provide help and support to ensure that they could understand and complete assigned school work. Difficulties connecting to the internet was also mentioned by research participants. For example:

*“The [assigned school] module is hard.*

*Our parents can’t help us all the time because they are busy looking for food.*

*Our parents didn’t go to school.*

*They don’t know how to help us.*

*It’s difficult.”<sup>142</sup>*

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<sup>140</sup> FGD with 2 adolescents, 14 and 18 years, and 2 parents / carers, 52 and 65 years, Shariff Aguak, 15 March 2022.

<sup>141</sup> FGD with 5 adults / carers, 30 – 73 years, Maguindanao PSWDO, 12 March 2022.

<sup>142</sup> FGD with 5 adolescents, 15 – 17 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

Routine and recurring displacements, driven by a mix of conflict, flooding and *rido*, have impacted on the ability of families and service providers to ensure a protective environment for children in SPMS Box. The case study demonstrates not only the severe protection risks and challenges experienced by displaced families and children, including the risk of injury and even death arising from recurring eruptions of violence; being separated from parents; being drawn into harmful child labour in order to supplement the disrupted income of their parents; association with armed groups; exposure to negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage; and, perhaps, to an increased risk of family violence triggered by economic and psychological stress. It also demonstrates the considerable challenges in delivering protection services in a very unstable and insecure context. Preventing and responding to child protection risks in a context of recurring and disorganised evacuations within a child protection system that is already greatly under-capacitated, is a considerable challenge. Available SWOs are routinely being deployed to distribute food and other non-food items, limiting their ability to address child protection needs. Recurring displacement also limits the ability of SWOs to provide continuity of child protection case management and other programmes and services and restricts local service delivery where service providers are also displaced.

Based on the case study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The BARMM Government should ensure that a specific IDP law is adopted, which sets out the rights and entitlements of displaced children, families and individuals and fully complies with international standards;
- As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen the child protection system in BARMM, the Government of BARMM should develop a comprehensive vision, policy and costed strategy / action plan for the strengthening of the child protection system. It should ensure that the rights and entitlements of displaced children and families are comprehensively covered within these initiatives, and that the views of children and families in displacement be captured to ensure they are meaningfully engaged in this process.
- MSSD should develop and adopt detailed regulations and guidance (e.g. Standard Operating Procedures) that provide detail on how the child protection system should be implemented in practice in the context of displacement. The SOPs should detail how the village / community child protection system connects to the provincial level system, in particular through developing robust referral pathways from the village level for child protection cases, including cases involving sexual violence and child marriage in the context of displacement.
- As part of its ongoing efforts to establish and strengthen multi-sector child protection committees at the local level, headed by LSWDOs, MSSD should ensure that the Committees receive comprehensive training and tools on addressing child protection needs in situations of displacement.
- It is recommended that the MSSD consider the development of robust public-private partnerships / outsourcing to expand child protection services for children and families in displacement, while at the same time maintaining control and oversight over the system.
- It is also recommended that learning from successful existing (I)NGO-Government partnerships (e.g. the Join Child Protection / Gender-based Violence Working Group) be utilised to inform the strengthening of government-NGO partnerships.

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- As part of its efforts to develop and expand case management services within its child protection system, it is recommended that MSSD ensure that children and families in displacement are covered by this system.
  - It is recommended that a mechanism for feedback and complaints for children and families in displacement be developed and implemented. Avenues for meaningful engagement in the development and strengthening of child protection systems and services more generally should also be developed, and care should be taken to ensure it includes children from a range of circumstances and situations, including children in vulnerable situations.
  - It is recommended that MSSD implement evidence-based social behaviour change strategies to prevent child marriage, harmful child labour and the involvement of children in armed groups.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Ethical protocol

#### 8.1.1 Harm / benefit analysis

A fundamental principle of ethical research with human (and in particular, child and youth) participants is ‘do no harm’. This means that the welfare and best interests of participants are the primary considerations guiding the design of the methodology and data collection methods.

UNICEF’s and Coram International’s ethical guidelines require a consideration of whether the research needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it, and, if so, in what capacity. An analysis of potential harms of the research on children and other participants, is required, along with an assessment of the benefits of the research. Strategies are required to ensure that children are not harmed as a result of their participation in the research, and that distress due to their participation is minimised.

#### ***Benefit analysis***

It is important to establish that the research will bring benefit to children and their communities more generally and that it is necessary (the research process will bring about *new* information or knowledge). It must also be demonstrated that it is necessary for children to be involved in the research as participants.

The justification and rationale for the research is set out in the study’s inception report. In summary, the main objective of the research is to assess the impact and relevance of the Social Services Regular Programme; to review the performance of the child protection system (including the child justice system); to review the Social Service Workforce needs in BARMM, using the Bangsamoro Transition Plan as a reference document; and to review, analyze and provide advice on policies related to child-friendly justice applicable to the BARMM context.

The rationale for carrying out the research is to improve the quality and reach of social service provision for vulnerable children and families in BARMM by generating evidence-based knowledge, information and data on the Social Services Regular Programme<sup>143</sup>, the related workforce and the overall functioning of the child protection and child justice systems. In terms of the child justice system, the overall purpose of the review is to review the current laws and practice in relation to children in conflict with the law, to determine their effectiveness and impact and to provide advice on policy for any necessary reforms to bring the law practice in line with international standards.

There are very limited existing data and analysis on the child protection risks and needs of BARMM’s children, along with very limited evidence on the functioning of the child protection, child justice and social welfare systems. Efforts aimed at strengthening these systems and services must rely on a robust evidence base. This research is therefore crucial in providing the evidence needed in responding to the gaps, barriers, bottlenecks and opportunities within social welfare, child protection and child justice systems and services.

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<sup>143</sup> The Social Services Regular Programme consists of five programmes. They are: 1) Family and Community Welfare; 2) Children and Youth Welfare; 3) Women’s Welfare; 4) Disabled Persons and Older Person’s Welfare; and 5) Emergency Assistance.

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The research is timely: the formation of the new interim Government provides an opportunity for the development of social policies and programmes better suited to the specific context of Bangsamoro. This includes addressing underlying constraints in the provision of quality service delivery, the functioning of the child protection and child justice systems, and the capacity of the social services workforce. The knowledge generated from the review will be used to inform the development of a costed Social Services Sector Plan 2022-2035 as part of a larger effort by the BARMM Regional Government to deliver a peace dividend<sup>144</sup> for the population by reducing disparities, strengthening support for at-risk and vulnerable children as well as their families, and achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>145</sup>

The research will involve primary qualitative data collection, including key informant interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussions with service providers, case file reviews (of child protection and child justice cases), and a series of life-history interviews with children and families who have had experience in accessing / receiving social welfare, child protection or child justice services. It is likely that all data collection will be carried out remotely, in light of the difficulties accessing research participants due to the movement restrictions in-country as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research will also collect and analyse administrative data on the functioning of the social welfare, child protection and child justice systems (however, it will not involve primary quantitative data collection).

According to the research plan, data collection will take place at the regional level (with key stakeholders in the BARMM Government, along with NGOs), provincial level, across all of BARMM's five provinces and at the municipal level in three municipalities – Cotabato City, and municipalities in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. Sampling for KIIs and FGDs with service providers, case file reviews and in-depth life history interviews will take place at the provincial and municipality level in two provinces – Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. The range in research locations is important. While the study is not quantitative and does not aim to generate data that is representative in a technical sense, it is nonetheless important that the data are broadly generalisable and applicable across BARMM and that findings are generated across different contextual factors and beneficiary characteristics. It is therefore important that data are collected (virtually) from a range of different locations across the country.

It is important that, in assessing the social welfare, child protection and child justice systems and services that beneficiaries (children and families) are included in the data collection. This is essential for ensuring that these systems and services are assessed according to the direct experiences, views and feedback of the persons that the programme aims to directly impact and that any recommendations resulting from the research considers the views and perspectives of the children and parents / carers. It is also important to include children in the research, as child participation in decisions affecting them is a fundamental right.<sup>146</sup>

### **Harm analysis**

Children and parents / carers involved in the evaluation could face secondary trauma, as they will likely be discussing quite sensitive material (personal experiences of child protection harms, experiences with the child justice system, vulnerabilities connected to accessing social welfare support). This may be exacerbated when

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<sup>144</sup> Crisis Group International, Southern Philippines, Keeping Normalisation on Track in the Bangsamoro, Report 313, Asia, 15 April 2021, p.1 < <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/313-southern-philippines-keeping-normalisation-track-bangsamoro> > accessed 16 April 2021

<sup>145</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>146</sup> See article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

carrying out interviews virtually, as the researcher will not be physically present with the participant, which could impair their ability to determine any harm or trauma that the child may be experiencing. It should be noted that the data collection will be carried out according to the 'do no harm' principle – that, where the data collection is likely to cause harm to participants, the needs of the participants will be paramount. Nonetheless, the importance of child participation in the data collection is recognised; it is also recognised that, provided the right conditions are in place, children can find it empowering to discuss their experiences and understand that this may contribute to improved programming for children at risk of harm.

To minimise potential harm caused to child participants, children will be given the option of carrying out the interview with a trusted adult (e.g. a parent / carer or social worker, where appropriate), or a friend. In addition, researchers are highly qualified and experienced at interviewing children and will use sensitive, age-appropriate tools and techniques.

Front-line professionals and experts could face risks to their employment should it be discovered that they have expressed views that are contrary to dominant social norms, values and beliefs. However, this risk will be mitigated through carrying out individual interviews with experts and professionals where there are sensitivities (i.e. not FGDs) and through following strict anonymity and data protection protocols (see below).

### ***Harm minimisation strategies***

It is important to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to minimise physical and emotional harm to participants and to researchers. The following strategies will be used to minimise harm and ensure the meaningful participation of children, parents / carers, professionals and experts in the research.

### **Selection and training of researchers**

All researchers have necessary qualifications, knowledge and considerable experience carrying out data collection with professionals, government representatives, youth, children, families and community members, including on sensitive topics including child protection and child justice. The international team has been working in the Philippines since 2017, including in conducting a comprehensive situation analysis of children and a child protection systems assessment in BARMM. Both national researchers are based in the Philippines and have extensive experience carrying out research on sensitive topics, including with children and families. International researchers have all undergone criminal history checks and all researchers, including national researchers, have been required to sign a code of conduct as part of the contracting process.

Researchers will all be involved in an orientation session prior to pre-testing of tools and data collection. This will be led by the Team Leader / International Experts and will cover the purpose and aims of the research, ensuring familiarity with the data collection tools and training on the ethical protocol and tools.

### **Pre-testing tools**

The data collection tools, along with the ethical tools (information sheets and consent forms) will be piloted on a small sample of research participants in BARMM, in order to test the understanding and utility of the tools and their cultural appropriateness, allowing for tools to be adjusted before data collection commences.

### **Recruitment of research participants**

Researchers will need to ensure that recruitment of participants does not increase the risk of them suffering from harm through the experience through re-traumatisation (through, for example, discussion of traumatic

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experiences). Selection of participants will be done through consultation with the government and NGO service providers who work with them, to ensure participants are only involved where they are unlikely to experience secondary trauma through the interview process. Participants will only be recruited from the age of 12 years.

Two national experts have been recruited on the basis of their knowledge or experience of the child protection, child justice and social welfare systems and are unlikely to be put at risk, given they are already recognised as experts in this area. Similarly, 'front-line professionals will be selected on the basis of them having an existing role in the child protection / child justice / social welfare system and will therefore already be known to the community in this capacity.

### **Design of data collection tools and data collection approaches and processes**

The topics covered in the research may cause distress to some participants, particularly those that have had experienced or experienced types of violence or other treatment that are stigmatised (e.g. sexual abuse or exploitation). Throughout interviews, Researchers will be led by the 'do no harm' principle, which requires that the data collection be considered secondary to the need to avoid harm to research participants. This will be covered in-depth in the orientation session, with practical examples being given.

Where it is clear that the interview is having a negative effect on a participant (e.g. the participant breaks down, becomes very quiet and withdrawn, becomes shaky etc.), Researchers will be advised to suggest stopping the interview and will suggest follow up support to the participant. Where participants reveal current or past experiences of violence or exploitation, researchers will convey empathy, but will not show shock or anger, as this can be harmful to persons who have experienced violence (please refer to section below on how child protection disclosures will be addressed). These matters will be covered in-depth during the orientation session with the Researchers.

In order to reduce the risk of stress or harm to participants:

- Data collection tools have been designed in a manner that avoids direct, confronting questions, judgement and blame. They have also been developed to ensure that they are relevant to the cultural context. Pre-testing these tools will ensure that they are relevant and appropriate and that they avoid confronting or culturally insensitive questions.
- Interviews may cover particularly sensitive or traumatic material, and it is important to ensure that participants feel empowered and not solely like victims. Interviews will finish on a 'positive or empowering note' through asking questions about what would improve the situation of migrant children in their community. This will help to ensure that participants do not leave the interview focusing on past traumatic experiences.
- In order to reduce stress caused to children and parents / carers in individual interviews, children and parents / carers will be provided with the opportunity to participate in data collection with a trusted adult or friend if this would make them feel more at ease. Researchers should identify staff at institutions (e.g. MSDSS offices, community groups, shelter staff etc.) that are available to accompany participants, if requested.

### **Ensuring the safety of participants and Researchers**

Given the security challenges posed by the Covid-19 response in the Philippines, including in BARMM, it is likely that most of the research will be carried out remotely, via Zoom / WhatsApp / Skype etc. It may be possible for researchers to visit Cotabato City – one of the research locations, enabling face-to-face research. However, visits to the other research locations (in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur) may not be possible. For face-to-face interviews, researchers will follow a strict Covid-19 protocol (see below) and interviews will be carried out in a public place (government or NGO offices, offices of service providers etc.) and during daylight hours.

For remote interviews, researchers will communicate with participants to ensure that they are in a private but central location during the virtual interview, including in government buildings and offices, community centres, NGO and UN offices. However, where preferable for participants, interviews may be carried out where participants are located in their households. All data collection will take place in daylight hours.

Coram International will take measures to support the mental wellbeing of Researchers. Coram has a Mental Health First Aid focal point within its staff and researchers will be provided with the opportunity to de-brief with the manager of the research project or member of staff responsible for supervising data collection. Researchers will be sign-posted to counselling services if required.

### **Responding to trauma, distress and protection disclosures**

During the data collection process, child participants may disclose information that raises child protection concerns – i.e. that they are at risk of significant harm. As participants will be accessed through government and non-government service providers, it is likely that they will already have accessed necessary services and support for past child protection issues. However, to ensure that participants who have protection concerns are identified and responded to appropriately, a referral process has been developed in collaboration with MSSD (the Government ministry responsible for child protection). This referral process and accompanying tools / forms is attached at Annex 6. However, in summary, the following measures will be taken:

- A protection committee will be established composed of representatives from UNICEF Philippines, Coram International and MSSD in order to receive referrals of cases in which there are child protection concerns from researchers and consider and respond to them appropriately (e.g. whether to make an immediate formal child protection referral or, where this is not required, a service provider to refer the child or family to);
- A focal point will be designated within the MSSD in each research location to receive child protection referrals, where required;
- A child protection protocol has been developed in collaboration with the MSSD to ensure that referrals are made, where appropriate, to the MSSD focal point, who will then be able to refer the child to appropriate services (e.g. the MSSD office or if necessary, an NGO service provider / implementing partner); and
- All researchers will be provided with in-depth training on the child protection protocol, including through the use of practical, hypothetical scenarios and role plays.

It is also possible that adult participants disclose past or current traumatic experiences. In these cases, it is essential that participants provide consent to any protection referrals. Participants will be given a list of service providers that they are able to contact to receive support or assistance.

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### 8.1.2 Principle of respect: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality

Researchers must ensure that all participation in the research is voluntary and takes place only if informed consent is given by each research participant.

#### ***Informed consent and voluntary participation***

Researchers will ensure that participation in research is on a voluntary basis. Researchers will explain to participants in clear, age-appropriate language that participants are not *required* to participate in the study, and that they may stop participating in the research at any time. Researchers will carefully explain that refusal to participate will not result in any negative consequences. Incentives will not be provided to participants in order to ensure that participation in the research has not been induced. However, where transport costs are incurred, they will be reimbursed (though this is unlikely, as data collection will be carried out remotely). These matters are set out clearly in the study's participant information sheets. Participants will be clearly advised that their participation or lack of participation in the study will not lead to any direct benefits or sanctions / removal of benefits.

All research participants will be required to give positive informed consent in order to participate in the study. Researchers will use information and consent forms with interviews with national stakeholders, front-line professionals / service providers, children and parents / carers. All participants will be given an information sheet containing information about the study and ethical protocol, along with the contact details of service providers and health care providers in case the participant requires access to services following the interview. For interviews with children, parental consent will also be required. Where it is not possible for a parent / carer to give consent (e.g. where a child is separated from their, is accessed through a children's home or where it would be harmful to request consent from a parent), the child's consent to participate in the research will be sufficient. This is important to ensure that a diverse range of children are included in the research, including children who are separated from parents. For children who are unable to read and write, the research will read the consent form to the child and indicate on the form that the child has given consent.

At the start of each interview, research participants will be informed of the purpose and nature of the study, their contribution, and how the data collected from them will be used in the study, verbally and through an information sheet (Annexes 2 – 4), which will be made available in the language of research participants. The information form explains, in clear, appropriate language, the nature of the study, the participant's expected contribution and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary. Researchers will be advised to talk participants through the information form and ensure that they understand it.

If unsure, researchers will request the participant to relay the key information back to them to ensure that they have understood it. Participants will also be advised that the information they provide will be held in strict confidence (see below).

Special efforts will be made to ensure that all children have given informed consent (that they are aware of the purpose and nature of the study and their involvement in it). Special care must be taken to ensure that especially vulnerable participants give informed consent. In this context, vulnerable participants may include those with disabilities or learning difficulties or those mental health issues. Informed consent could be obtained through the use of alternative, tailored communication tools and / or with the help of adults that work with the participants.

In addition to seeking consent from individual participants, it is important to seek the support of the relevant service providers. In order to achieve this, letters will be sent to the key government departments along with key NGO service providers. The letters will explain the purpose and nature of the study and the purpose of the data collection, and requests assistance from these institutions to access research participants.

### **Anonymity and data protection**

The identity of all research participants will be kept confidential throughout the process of data collection as well as in the analysis and writing up study findings. The following measures will be used to ensure anonymity:

- Interviews will take place remotely in a secure, private location (where possible, in a room within a service provider's office / government office etc.) which ensures that the participant's answers are not overheard;
- Researchers will not record the name of participants and will ensure that names are not recorded on any documents containing collected data, including on transcripts of interviews. Each participant will be assigned a number and this number will be used on the transcript. A matrix containing the participant's name and number will be stored separately on a password protected Dropbox account (in a separate file to the transcripts) to ensure that consent forms are able to be matched to each participant;
- Researchers will delete electronic records of data from laptops immediately after they are sent to Coram International (in a password-protected and secure Dropbox account);
- Coram International will store all data on a secure, locked server, to which persons who are not employed by the Centre cannot gain access. All employees of Coram International, including volunteers and interns, receive a criminal record check before employment commences;
- Transcripts will be saved on the secure server for a period of three years and will then be deleted; and
- Research findings will be presented in such a way as to ensure that individuals are not able to be identified.

All participants will be informed of their rights to anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process, verbally and in information sheets.

It is noted that interview transcripts will be typed or handwritten in real time (where possible, interviews will be carried out with two researchers – one conducting the interview and another recording notes from the interview). For remote interviews with key informants and stakeholders, permission will be required to make an audio recording of the interview. All audio files will be stored on a secure, password protected Coram International Dropbox account. Audio recordings will not be used in interviews with children and parents / carers, as this could be intimidating and may lead to participants feeling unable to communicate freely and provide more authentic information.

#### **8.1.3 Protection from Covid-19-related risks**

It is noted that many interviews will be carried out remotely and these remote interviews will take the form of individual interviews; therefore, there is no risk of infection with Covid-19 as a result of these interviews. However, should it be possible for researchers to carry out face-to-face data collection, including with key stakeholders, children and families and during the course of observation visits, the following measures will be put in place in order to protect researchers from Covid-19 infection.

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## ***Vaccination***

It is noted that both national researchers are fully (double) vaccinated.

## ***Participant Recruitment: screening***

When researchers have determined participants are suitable and willing to participate in face-to-face data collection, they will undertake screener questions to establish whether participants:

- are experiencing any flu-like and/or COVID-19 symptoms;
- have been diagnosed with COVID-19;
- have been in close contact with any individuals experiencing any flu-like and/or COVID-19 symptoms;
- have been in close contact with any individuals diagnosed with COVID-19;
- are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to COVID-19;
- are defined as either Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or Clinically Vulnerable;
- are content and confident to participate in face-to-face data collection, specifically any activities in which they may be asked to engage e.g. group activities with other participants in a central location; and
- have any specific concerns regarding participating in face-to-face data collection.

Participants who respond to screener questions which indicate they have Covid-19, have a high risk of infection and/or are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to Covid-19 and/or are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable will not be recruited for face-to-face data collection.

Researchers will ensure that, when recording responses to screener questions, no inferences are made to the actual health of participants. Researchers are not health professionals. The screener questions are to be used to reduce potential risk to others involved in research (including research participants and researchers). Researchers will be informed that they must inform participants that if their health situation changes between the time of recruitment and face to face data collection they can no longer participate.

Participants will be provided with a telephone number, website, email, and contact address which participants can contact if they become infected with Covid-19 between recruitment and participating in any face-to-face data collection exercises. This information will be included in the information sheet on access to services for responding to trauma or protection needs (to be developed in collaboration with UNICEF and national researchers).

Researchers will inform participants of the implications of participating in any face-to-face data collection, specifically any contact tracing applications and actions required which apply to the country where face to face data collection is being undertaken.

## ***Preparations for Face-to-Face Data Collection***

During face-to-face data collection, researchers will:

- Position themselves in a location where they are able to adhere to social distancing requirements (i.e. position themselves 1.5 metres away from persons);
- Ensure participants adhere to social distancing requirements, particularly during FGDs (i.e. position chairs 1.5 metres apart);

- Carry tissues and sanitary wipes and throw away in a bin any which are used – ask participants to use hand sanitiser on entering and leaving the interview / FGD room;
- Avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes;
- Avoid any physical contact such as shaking a participant’s hand;
- Be aware that asking individuals to participate in research may cause unnecessary stress and concern and to take steps to offer assurances to mitigate such concerns; and
- Wear a face mask, face shield and provide the same to participants.

Researchers will be required to sign an undertaking that they will comply with these requirements, along with other ethical requirements as part of the contracting process.

Researchers will ensure that if there has been a time delay between recruitment and data collection, the screener questions to establish Covid-19 risk, are repeated before face-to-face data collection commences. Researchers must ensure that any participants whose screener responses raise concerns are asked to withdraw from the data collection activity and/or re-directed to completing the activity via an alternative data collection method e.g. online, telephone.

All information sheets and other materials shared during interviews and FGDs will be done in a way to reduce risk of infection, including:

- Supplying sanitary cleansing wipes to clean data collection support materials ;
- Cleaning data collection support materials before and after being handled by participants;
- Producing data collection support materials in a durable material which is easy and effective to clean; and
- Providing instructions on how to handle and transfer materials to and from participants e.g. putting information on the ground, garden walls (as appropriate depending on the environment) and stepping back in accordance with social distancing requirements to allow participants to retrieve information.

As noted above, Researchers will provide participants a telephone number, website, email, and contact address which participants can contact if they become infected with Covid-19 following a face-to-face data collection exercise.

## 8.2 Data collection sample

### 8.2.1 FGDs with adolescents and parents / caregivers

Location and date	Description
Maguindanao PSWDO	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FGD with 5 adolescents, 16 – 18 years, 12 March 2022 (pilot).</li> <li>2. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 12 March 2022 (pilot).</li> </ol>
Sharif Aguak	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. FGD with 5 adolescents, 13 – 17 years, 15 March 2022.</li> <li>4. FGD with 2 adolescents (14 and 18 years) and 2 carers, 15 March 2022.</li> <li>5. FGD with 5 parents / carers, (insert ages) 15 March 2022.</li> </ol>
Datu Salibu	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. FGD with 5 adolescents, 13 – 16 years, 17 March 2022.</li> <li>7. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 36 – 52 years, 17 March 2022.</li> </ol>
Shariff Saiduna	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. FGD with 5 adolescents, 15 – 17 years, 16 March 2022.</li> <li>9. FGD with 5 parents / carers, 16 March 2022.</li> </ol>
Datu Saudi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. FGD with 10 parents / carers, 18 – 37 years, 18 March 2022.</li> </ol>

### 8.2.2 In-depth life history interviews (IDIs)

<b>Adolescents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Boy, 16 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.</li> <li>2. Girl, 13 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.</li> <li>3. Girl, 16 years, Datu Saiduna, 16 March 2022.</li> </ol>
<b>Parents / carers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Female, 38 years, Datu Salibu, 17 March 2022.</li> <li>5. Male, 36 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.</li> <li>6. Male, 72 years, Shariff Saiduna, 16 March 2022.</li> </ol>

### 8.2.3 Key informant interviews (KIIs) / FGDs

FGD	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FGD with four Provincial SWDOs (Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saiduna, Datu Salibu and Datu Saudi), Maguindanao, 12 March 2022.</li> <li>2. FGD with five NGOs / CSOs, Cotabato City, 17 March 2022.</li> </ol>
KII	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. KII with Child Protection Officer, UNICEF Mindanao, Cotabato City, 18 March 2022.</li> <li>4. KII with Protection Unit, International Organisation on Migration (IOM), Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.</li> <li>5. KII with Field Associate, UNHCR Mindanao, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.</li> <li>6. KII with Social Welfare Aid, MSSD, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.</li> <li>7. KII with Coordinator, Council for the Welfare of Children, Cotabato City, 15 March 2022.</li> </ol>