



## **A Changing World: Time and the Impact of Aid Reduction on IDP Children**

*Geopolitical scenarios and possible aid shifts can cut national budgets in countries with internally displaced persons, weakening services they rely on and increasing household stress—leaving children especially vulnerable and undermining stability and development. The Philippines receives official development aid grants mainly for health and social protection from the United Nations and the United States. Shifting global priorities are likely to reduce future funding for these sectors. To systematically trace the effects of aid reduction on IDP children, this paper - the 13<sup>th</sup> volume in our series on 'Internal Displacement in a Changing World Order' - presents time as an analytical factor. Through a longitudinal cohort study, time-based analysis also presents opportunities to identify sectors that require focus to sustain support for IDP children and policies that necessitate robust, consistent implementation.*

12 May 2026

Jennefer Lyn L. Bagaporo and Chona R. Echavez

The recent commotion over the reduction in humanitarian aid is likely to affect official development assistance (ODA). The ['freefall'](#) experienced by humanitarian funding is anticipated to affect development funding in the coming months and years. The [Institute for Economics & Peace](#) expressed that reductions in the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU), and the United Kingdom's (UK) aid to multilateral agencies such as the United Nations (UN) 'will have significant impacts on global ODA levels', as these entities' contribute to 'two thirds of all international aid disbursements.' Under these circumstances, ODA to the Philippines is likely to reduce as the USA, the UN System, and the EU are the country's [top sources of foreign aid](#).

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are most vulnerable when shifts in foreign aid occur. Because IDPs often live in countries that remain highly dependent on external support, changes in ODA directly affect national development budgets. These shifts in turn lead to reduced or lost social services and support systems for IDPs. Additionally, IDPs are often least equipped to withstand the impact of weakened local services and support systems. As a result, they experience family stress and coping strains, conditions that make IDP children even more vulnerable, as household spending and state investments benefiting children may decrease. All of these factors can undermine children's sense of stability and development.

Drawing on longitudinal data on marginalised children in Mindanao, this paper discusses how the potential impacts of reduced foreign aid on internally displaced children can be considerably tracked and assessed by using time as an analytical variable.

### **What aid cuts could mean for IDP children in Mindanao**

The Philippines is considered a lower-middle-income country in Southeast Asia, comprising three primary island groups: Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao. [The country](#) is still at risk from climate change and natural disasters, even though it has recently made some progress in reducing poverty, and poor and vulnerable people still have trouble accessing social services and earning money.

Regarding internal displacement, many IDPs displaced by conflict and disasters are in [Mindanao](#). National [displacement monitoring](#) and [humanitarian reports](#) from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report that several provinces, including Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and North Cotabato, have experienced [prolonged displacement](#) due to cycles of violence and disasters.

The different waves of the [Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child](#) (LCSCF) showed that Mindanao is more disadvantaged than the islands of Luzon and Visayas. Mindanao registered the largest number of

households enrolled in the national cash transfer program, *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)*. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) runs the [4Ps program](#), which gives cash to low-income families with conditions to help pay for their children's health and education needs. This shows that there are still big differences in wealth and income.

Mindanao also faces various threats to its main source of livelihood – agriculture. [LCSFC](#) reports a significant drop in the number of barangays (villages) on the island engaging in agricultural activities. A range of factors, including natural disasters, severe climate change, and armed clashes, may have contributed to the decline in households engaged in agriculture. Furthermore, Mindanao recorded the highest levels of programs related to poverty alleviation, social housing, and drug use. A [recent national report](#) about children highlighted that regions in the island continue to face the following challenges:

- High child mortality rates
- Low immunization coverage
- High adolescent pregnancy rates
- Stunting
- High child labor rates
- High number of children living in poverty

Given this context, marginalised children and adolescents in Mindanao, including IDPs, face livelihood insecurity and rely heavily on fragile support systems to have material security and ensure the continuity of their basic needs.

In terms of [foreign aid](#), the Philippines received 67 ODA grants in 2024, totaling US\$326.70 million. Of this amount, 42 percent were grants for medical and health-related initiatives, and 16 percent supported social-protection programs and projects. By the end of 2024, the Philippines had 313 active grants. The sectors receiving the largest share of grants were

the social reform and community development (98 grants), followed by agriculture, agrarian reform, and natural resources (92 grants).

As of December 2024, the UN system and the USA remained [the top sources of ODA Grants for the Philippines](#). Given the current geopolitical landscape and shifts in global ODA, foreign aid for programs and projects supporting social protection, health, and community initiatives is likely to decline. This will, in turn, result in reduced budgets for these critical sectors.

Many children in Mindanao already face inadequate social protection and unstable livelihoods, making continued aid essential to maintaining and improving their access to core services. [Reductions in aid](#) will not only worsen existing vulnerabilities for internally displaced children in Mindanao but also risk creating new ones, underscoring the need for sustained support. Despite this, social protection programs in the Philippines commonly work with non-profit development groups and donor-financed projects.

Stakeholders might feel more respected and appreciated for their efforts to bolster program execution and funding for services such as child protection, maternal health, and nutrition when they acknowledge the need for foreign aid.

### **Longitudinal comparisons: time as an analytical variable in assessing aid cuts' impact on IDP children**

Longitudinal research offers a unique capacity to examine how children's experiences evolve, capturing the interaction between developmental processes and social or environmental conditions across life stages rather than providing a single snapshot. From a life-course perspective, childhood and adolescence are critical periods during which cognitive, emotional, and social capacities develop, shaping how individuals understand and respond to their environments (Elder, 1998).

When children grow up in contexts marked by displacement and instability, the temporal dimension becomes particularly important, as the broader structures that shape their lives may remain uncertain even

as they mature. The Longitudinal Cohort Study of Filipino Children (LCSFC) offers an opportunity to observe these dynamics over an extended period. By comparing children's responses at around age 10 with those gathered again at around age 16, the analysis treats time itself as an analytical variable.

Persistent fears related to war and insecurity appear across survey waves, with participants increasingly expressing concerns about violence, displacement, and instability. Consistent with [existing research](#), prolonged exposure to conflict and displacement can undermine children's emotional well-being and sense of safety over time, suggesting that the experiences documented in the LCSFC align with broader conclusions that the impacts of conflict often endure beyond the immediate crisis.

Many also appeared to show a growing sense of agency, particularly in how they voiced their goals, interpreted their family circumstances, and described their responses to community-level challenges. Compared to earlier interviews, adolescents in later survey waves tended to describe their experiences more clearly and nuancedly. Many showed greater ability to discuss family situations, educational goals, and issues facing the community. According to developmental studies, these alterations reflect broader cognitive shifts that occur during adolescence, when people typically become more socially conscious and develop higher reasoning abilities (Blakemore, 2008). In contexts affected by displacement or poverty, this increased awareness may allow young people to interpret their experiences more critically, even when their material circumstances remain difficult.

The longitudinal findings show gradual shifts in structural conditions alongside children's developmental progression. Over six years, many participants demonstrated more adaptive coping strategies, greater awareness of their environments, and stronger self-expression. These patterns reflect broader [resilience research](#), which highlights the role of [ecological supports](#)—such as peer, family, and community networks—in

helping children navigate prolonged stress and instability amid displacement and structural constraints.

A particularly relevant scenario relative to potential reductions in foreign aid is the finding that structural problems affecting children's lives are difficult to change. Concerns about safety, access to services, and institutional support persisted over multiple survey waves. In such contexts, while children may develop stronger personal strategies for navigating adversity, the broader systems surrounding them continue to provide only fragile support. A decrease in foreign aid weakens already fragile social protection systems, risking further undermining children's access to education, healthcare, and community-based supports essential to their well-being.

Foreign aid helps strengthen public systems that address health, education, protection, and basic needs. The consequences of reduced aid extend beyond money problems; they also include programs that are getting worse at keeping kids safe from further harm. The findings emphasize that changes in aid flows have real effects on children's stability and prospects, highlighting the significance of bolstering national protection systems for children impacted by displacement and violence from a policy standpoint. To avoid these problems, officials need to ensure that aid flows remain the same or increase. They also need to ensure that assistance for Mindanao's internally displaced children is focused and consistent.

## **Conclusion**

This paper highlights the critical relationship between development assistance and the stability of children living in displacement-affected contexts in Mindanao. Using data from the LCSFC, the results show that children change significantly over time, becoming more reflective, articulate, and better able to manage tough situations. However, the main factors that affect their lives do not change much. Persistent insecurity, unequal access to vital services, and frail institutional support structures continue to define the daily lives of many children in conflict and disaster-affected areas. Under these circumstances, aid reduction

undermines children's material security and continuity of basic needs - factors that are fundamental to children's survival and development.

IDPs in the Philippines are still highly dependent on external support. Hence, changes in ODA directly affect the country's development budget, which in turn could result in a reduction or loss of the provision of social services and support systems for IDPs. This means that Republic Act No. 11188, also known as the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act, must be followed and enforced without fail. To improve enforcement, the government needs to establish dedicated oversight units, conduct regular compliance checks, and encourage cooperation between national and local agencies. For this law to work, lawmakers need to be resolute, monitoring systems need to be improved, national and local governments need to work together, and services that protect the welfare of at-risk children need to keep receiving funding.

Ultimately, protecting children who have been forced to leave their homes should be a top priority for both humanitarian and development groups. The stories told by the LCSFC show that children can be strong even when the systems around them are not particularly good. Still, resistance alone cannot replace good social protection. To ensure lasting stability, substantial resources must be dedicated to education, healthcare, psychosocial assistance, and community protection systems. This dedicated investment will help build more stable and equitable societies, prevent setbacks caused by aid reductions, and ensure that displaced children's needs are consistently met.

*Dr Jennefer Lyn L. Bagaporo is a Research Affiliate at the Research Institute for Mindanao Culture (RIMCU), Philippines. She has previously worked in not-for-profit organisations and local research institutions in Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Australia and has an extensive research experience on gender, violent conflicts and forced displacements, health, poverty, and vulnerability due to exclusion and lack of social protection.*

*Dr Chona R. Echavez is the Director of the Research Institute for Mindanao Culture (RIMCU), Philippines leading interdisciplinary research on inclusive development, displacement, child protection, gender equality, and climate-resilient livelihoods. She has been working in the field of social research for the more than 30 years, specifically in conflict and post-conflict across South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific (including Afghanistan, Bhutan, Philippines, Cambodia, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Tonga).*

*This topical paper is part of the special series on ‘Internal Displacement in a Changing World Order’, led by the [Internal Displacement Research Programme](#) at the RLI. The experts contributing to this series assess how rapid shifts in contemporary politics, plummeting levels of humanitarian aid and escalating global crises are impacting displacement-affected communities. The series ties into a recently-launched 45-chapter “[Handbook of Internal Displacement](#)” (2006) that comprehensively addresses this issue.*

## Selected bibliography

Betancourt, T. S., & Khan, K. T. (2008). The mental health of children affected by armed conflict: Protective processes and pathways to resilience. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 20(3), 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540260802090363>

Blakemore, S.-J. (2008). The social brain in adolescence. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 9(4), 267–277. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn2353>

Elder, G. H. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development*, 69(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1998.tb06128.x>

Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) 2025, *Official development assistance*, IEP, accessed 12 February 2026, [Official-Development-Assistance.pdf](#).

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2024, *Global report on internal displacement 2024*, accessed 17 March 2026, [IDMC-GRID-2024-Global-Report-on-Internal-Displacement.pdf](#).

Kalin, W., & de Clerq, P. (2025). The UN at 80: What lies ahead for internally displaced persons? Accessed 4 February 2026. [The UN at 80: What lies ahead for internally displaced persons? - Researching Internal Displacement](#).

Masten, A. S., & Narayan, A. J. (2012). Child development in the context of disaster, war, and terrorism: Pathways of risk and resilience. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 227–257. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100356>

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *Development co-operation report 2023: Debating the aid system*, accessed 7 February 2026, [Development Co-operation Report 2023 \(EN\)](#).

Republic of the Philippines 2024, *CY 2024 Consolidated Audit Report on the ODA-Funded Programs and Projects*, Commission on Audit, [Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) Projects | Commission on Audit](#).

Republic of the Philippines 2024, *Official Development Assistance: 2022 Update*, House of Representatives Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department, Quezon City.

Republic of the Philippines 2026, *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)*, accessed 18 February 2026, [About Us - Pantawid Pamilya](#).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2024, *Situation of children in the Philippines: Insights 2024*, accessed 20 February 2026, [20250102 sitan insights.pdf](#).

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2023, *Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 14 December 2023*, accessed 19 March 2026, [Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 14 December 2023 | OCHA](#).

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2024, *Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 30 November 2024*, accessed 19 March 2026, [Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 30 November 2024 - Philippines | ReliefWeb](#).

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2025, *Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 8 December 2025*, accessed 19 March 2026, [Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Snapshot as of 08 December 2025 | OCHA](#).

Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 81(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01067.x>

USC-Office of Population Studies Foundation, Inc. (OPS) 2018, *Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child. Baseline Survey Technical Report*, OPS Report Series No. 2, accessed 17 December 2025, [Office of Population Studies](#).

USC- OPS 2020, *Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child. Wave 3 Final Report*, OPS Report Series No. 5, accessed 22 December 2025, [Office of Population Studies](#).

USC-OPS 2021, *Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child. Wave 4 Final Report*, OPS Report Series No. 6, accessed 17 December 2025, [Office of Population Studies](#).

USC-OPS 2022, *Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child. Waves 4A, 5, and 5A Final Report*, OPS Report Series No. 6, accessed 17 December 2025, [Microsoft Word - Wave 4A and Wave 5 Final Report 01112023](#).