



**Australian Government**



## THE PHILIPPINES COVID-19 DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE PLAN

- Australia and the Philippines will celebrate 75 years of diplomatic ties in 2021. Australia supports a sovereign, resilient Philippines that returns quickly to economic growth post COVID-19.
- The Philippines is vulnerable to COVID-19 due to an inadequate health system, high urban density and growing inequality. High infection rates and containment measures will have long-term economic impacts.
- In partnership with the Philippines, Australia will bolster health security and support women and children, including through education programs. Our peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao contribute to stability.

The Philippines is one of Australia's longest-standing bilateral relationships and we will celebrate 75 years of diplomatic ties in 2021. Bilateral cooperation is underpinned by the Philippines-Australia Comprehensive Partnership. Philippine and Australian foreign and trade ministers regularly meet under the auspices of the Philippines-Australia Ministerial Meeting.

### COVID-19 SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Philippines has one of the most acute outbreaks of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia, with Metropolitan Manila and other urban areas particularly affected. The Philippine Government and the World Health Organization (WHO) worked to strengthen the health system during a hard lockdown early in the pandemic, but the rapid spread of the virus once movement restrictions were eased led to overcrowding of hospitals, exacerbated by high infection rates among frontline medical workers.

The Philippine economy was on track for growth exceeding 6 per cent in 2020, but is now forecast to contract by 5.5 per cent. Businesses have been affected by containment measures and COVID-19 has reduced Philippine domestic consumption and purchasing power, and increased unemployment particularly among low-income workers in the informal sector. Remittances were worth almost 10 per cent of GDP in 2019 but many overseas Filipino workers have been repatriated, which is expected to reduce foreign remittances by 20 per cent according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Global travel restrictions have effectively shut down the Philippine tourism sector (worth 13 per cent of GDP).

On 30 March 2020, the Philippine Government announced plans to implement the largest social protection program in Philippine history as part of the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, including cash grants to 18 million low-income families. There have, however

been delays and difficulties dispersing these grants. To support its economic response, the Philippine Government has accessed close to \$5.8 billion in new loans from the ADB, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and World Bank.

Food insecurity is a significant issue for the poorest and most vulnerable, especially in urban areas, and there is potential for further food shortages due to impacts on supply chains and export restrictions in supply markets.

The pandemic has stalled education and training. Schools and universities have closed as part of community quarantine measures, but most families do not have reliable internet access, which limits online learning. However, 97 per cent of Filipino households have access to radio or television, which offers potential alternative distance education options. Learning loss and children dropping out of the education system are real risks the longer that schools remain closed to face-to-face learning. In the long term, this would reinforce inequality and have detrimental effects on the economy.

These vulnerabilities are compounded by the changing nature of work due to automation and digitalisation, which could see families that lose employment take children out of school to work. COVID-19 has accelerated demand for the adoption of digital technologies that may exacerbate disruptions to employment for at-risk sectors of the Philippine economy, such as the business process outsourcing and light manufacturing sectors.

Women and girls have been disproportionately disadvantaged by the impacts of COVID-19. Many Filipino women are employed in service industries like retail, hospitality and tourism, which have contracted. Women were already overrepresented in the informal economy and lack labour and harassment protections. The UN estimates 6.6 million Filipino women are employed informally. While women have been expected



to take on primary childcare responsibilities during school closures, Philippine businesses do not typically have flexible work arrangements. More can be done to improve reporting of gender-based violence incidences.

The year-old Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was hit by COVID-19 as many of its new institutions were being established. The region's conflict-affected population is vulnerable. Medical facilities and government services, including education, are lacking. Conflict and natural hazards regularly cause mass displacement. Clan violence has increased since the lockdown, as has political violence, as local powerbrokers begin to position themselves ahead of the 2022 elections. Extremist groups and breakaway factions of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that oppose the peace process are using dissatisfaction, unemployment and insecurity to recruit while the police and military focus on quarantine enforcement.

Unchecked, the security gains that have been made in Marawi since 2017 could be eroded. Any deterioration in security in the southern Philippines could reverberate in neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia, with flow on effects for regional security.

## **AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE**

As the second largest bilateral grants partner for the Philippines, Australia will collaborate with the Philippine Government to help manage and recover from COVID-19. We will do so with a focus on strengthening health security, maintaining stability and promoting economic recovery. Given the difficulty in predicting when the transition from response to recovery will begin, Australia will support a variety of short and medium-term investments in parallel in the Philippines.

### **Health Security**

Australia's development assistance will seek to improve the Philippine Government's capacity to respond to health needs that have both arisen from and been exacerbated by COVID-19. Given our long-standing partnerships with key humanitarian and multilateral organisations, we are well placed to pivot to deliver critical equipment and services, and support Philippine agencies to address constraints and improve their systems. Australian assistance for the COVID-19 health response will help ensure that the Philippine Government and multilateral partners can continue to deliver broader health support.

To date, Australia has worked with local humanitarian and multilateral partners to deliver much-needed assistance to the Philippine health system. This has

included increasing the capacity of COVID-19 testing through new laboratories, sourcing one million masks, providing personal protective equipment benefiting 38,200 health workers, establishing triage facilities for pregnant women, and sourcing a specialised ambulance. Australia is also supporting equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in the Philippines through multilateral and regional initiatives to finance, assess, deliver, and monitor COVID-19 vaccines.

With the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Australia is supporting the Philippine Government to streamline approvals for emergency medical supplies and pharmaceuticals. We will build on this immediate health support by continuing to work with partners to provide health equipment and supplies, in close coordination and consultation with the Philippine Government.

Australia's health efforts include support for systems as well as practical measures to combat the pandemic. With the World Bank, Australia will help the Department of Health forecast and procure medical equipment and supplies, and improve management of medical waste: a critical measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. We will help develop data analytical capabilities that can be used by the Philippine Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, which coordinates the COVID-19 response. Australia is also supporting the Philippine Department of Education to promote handwashing and hygiene in schools.

In partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, Australia will support community health centres that service geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas in Mindanao and help establish quarantine and isolation areas. We will also work with multilateral partners and the Philippine authorities to help contain the spread of the virus in correctional facilities.

In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, Australia will provide maternal, sexual and reproductive health services, supplies and information to women and girls, which will include practical guidance on limiting exposure to COVID-19.

With the UN Refugee Agency, Australia will support projects that mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including establishing water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. We will also provide core relief items (hygiene kits, sleeping mats, blankets, plastic sheets, solar lamps and mosquito nets) to families displaced by conflict and affected by COVID-19, and to returning overseas Filipino workers. To reach those in most need, this investment will monitor and report on the most at-risk groups, including



internally displaced persons.

Australia's Department of Defence supported the purchase of medical equipment for a Philippine military hospital's infectious disease ward, helping to manage COVID-19 within the Armed Forces of the Philippines as it implements community containment measures.

### **Stability**

Australia's support to the Philippines will aim to foster inclusive, cohesive communities and help mitigate threats to regional security. This will reinforce our strong defence and security cooperation provided through Australia's Enhanced Defence Cooperation Program, and cooperation led by Australia's Department of Home Affairs and the Australian Federal Police. It will include a substantial focus on the BARMM, which is home to some of the country's poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Australia's investments in education will help ensure learning continuity for students and avoid an increase in school dropout rates which would have long term economic and social implications. We will assist with distance learning by adapting teaching and learning resources and helping train teachers to deliver classes remotely, including tailored support for learners with disabilities. Given the risks posed by having children spend more time online because of COVID-19 quarantine measures, we will help parents and children to support home-based learning and alert them to the increased risks of online child sexual exploitation and abuse by predators. We are also supporting Philippine government and law enforcement to ensure reporting and support services remain available for children at risk or affected by online exploitation through a UNICEF-led consortium.

Through Australia's governance programs, we are developing a network of civil society organisations, national and local government leaders, and other stakeholders that are able to help the Philippine Government make timely COVID-19 related decisions and develop healthcare and economic policy.

Through partnerships between Filipino and Australian educational institutions, Australia Awards Short Courses will provide Philippine government agencies with high quality capacity building programs in priority fields to help manage and respond to COVID-19. Australia will encourage women's leadership, meaningful participation and gender sensitive community work in these responses.

In partnership with the World Bank, Australia will assist the BARMM to implement its COVID-19 response. This

will include providing advisory support to key regional government ministries to assess social impacts, develop long term recovery and rehabilitation strategies, and reduce the impact of COVID-19 in MILF camps. This work will complement our long-standing efforts to promote peace and stability in conflict affected regions in Mindanao. Our investments in the BARMM will also support community monitoring of conflict and displacement, the economic security of the most vulnerable families, and locally-led projects that support social cohesion.

We will continue our work with UNFPA to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and the continuation of services for women and children affected by violence. Caseworkers and counsellors will receive training to provide remote or online counselling. GBV service providers will be provided with protective equipment to ensure safety during service delivery.

Given the disproportionate financial impact of the pandemic on vulnerable, poor and low-skilled Filipinos, making sure social protections like emergency cash payments reach those most in need is vital. Through the World Bank, Australia will support the design of digital solutions to help ensure that emergency payments from the Philippine Government reach the poorest and most vulnerable. In partnership with UNICEF, we will assist women, indigenous people and people with disabilities to access cash payments and actively participate in development and livelihood programs.

Through the IFC, Australia will support the development of crop insurance for low-income farmers to help mitigate risks compounded by the pandemic. Our investment in social protections will help embed changes that make poorer Philippine households less vulnerable beyond COVID-19.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research will support food security and resilience by assessing vulnerabilities, supporting research, and providing technical advice on food safety and agricultural issues to strengthen agribusiness and supply chains.

Australia's support for maritime security and countering violent extremism will help the Philippine Government manage security challenges that are being exacerbated by COVID-19.

### **Economic Recovery**

As the Philippines emerges from strict lockdown, it has become the government's highest priority to prevent an economic crisis: the country is in its first recession in three decades. To support the Philippine Government's



economic recovery program, Australia will work innovatively with key partners to strengthen policies and institutions and advance inclusive economic growth. We will also work with local governments and women-led small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to increase their preparedness for and resilience to economic shocks, including impacts from climate change.

Both the Philippine Government and business community are looking at how they can better position themselves through the digitalisation of the economy. There are opportunities for Australian companies to provide digital services and solutions, leverage the expanding e-commerce platforms, improve cybersecurity and boost online education, as well as support digital infrastructure development.

In line with the Philippine Government's commitment to ramp up its infrastructure program to boost employment, we will support project preparation and capacity building for the government's Public Private Partnerships Center. This national level work will be complemented by subnational efforts, where Australia will help local governments access financing for infrastructure and improve planning to increase resilience against disasters and public health emergencies.

Protecting and reinforcing positive shifts in gender norms will be key to maintaining and advancing women's economic opportunities. Australia will provide financial capital to women-led SMEs to offset COVID-19 impacts, and assist businesses to adopt workplace gender equality strategies.

The pandemic has made more urgent the need for semi and low-skilled workers to adapt to the emerging

changes facing key Philippine industries. To this end, Australia will help the Philippine Government and the private sector with the challenges of technological disruption, which have been exacerbated by COVID-19, by helping identify the skills required by workers most at risk of being displaced by automation. Efforts to reskill and upskill workers will be important to boost labour competitiveness and kick-start the economy.

## HOW WE WILL WORK

Where possible, Australia will seek to magnify the impact of our spending by supporting the Philippines so it can deploy its own resources to greater effect with a focus on policy reforms and building capacities. We will continue to work through established, trusted partners and provide support to strengthen the Philippines' own systems. We will promote innovative approaches to tackling COVID-19, especially in areas in which there are critical needs and where Australia offers a comparative advantage.

Australian Government agencies will work together to make the most of the full suite of ODA and non-ODA investments. We will maintain adequate flexibility in our bilateral program to ensure that we can remain responsive to emerging priorities. We will also continue to deliver our programs at both the national and community level, working with Philippines Government and other local partners, business, multilateral agencies, research organisations and civil society.

Australia will carefully monitor and evaluate progress against this plan and consult regularly with partners to ensure it remains fit for purpose.



TABLE 1: COVI+D-19 RESPONSE PLAN PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Program Plan	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
<b>Expected Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philippine Government addresses critical constraints to the health system's COVID-19 response (SDG 3)</li> <li>Targeted schools, health facilities and laboratories are better equipped to respond to COVID-19 (SDG 3)</li> </ul> <p>Filipinos most vulnerable to disasters and emergencies receive essential relief, including for sexual, reproductive, and maternal health (SDG 1, 3, 5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philippine Government and NGO social protection programs, including COVID-19 emergency grants, are more efficient, effective and inclusive (SDG 1)</li> <li>Leaders take opportunities to influence Philippine Government adoption of reforms related to COVID-19 response and recovery (SDG 16)</li> <li>Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) strengthens service delivery in conflict-affected areas (SDG 4, 16)</li> <li>Conflict-affected communities build cohesion to mitigate COVID-19 impacts on conflict and violent extremism (SDG 16)</li> <li>Responsible stakeholders (e.g. government, law enforcement, judiciary, local groups, private sector communities, families) cooperate more effectively to keep children safe from online predators (SDG 16)</li> <li>Local authorities continue to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) (SDG 5, 16)</li> </ul> <p>Philippine stakeholders (e.g. government, private sector companies, farmers) enhance food security by addressing vulnerabilities of smallholder farmers, food and agricultural systems, and value chains to impacts of COVID-19 and other shocks (SDG 2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philippine Government stimulus and economic recovery measures supported by Australia are informed by robust data and analysis (SDG 8, 10)</li> <li>Local governments strengthen their preparedness for and resilience to economic shocks (SDG 11, 13)</li> <li>Women SMEs mitigate financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 5, 10)</li> <li>People affected by disasters and emergencies are participating in local economic activities to support long term recovery (SDG 8, 11)</li> </ul>
<b>Key Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of strengthened health systems for (a) forecasting needs, importing, procuring, and distributing medical equipment and supplies; (b) healthcare waste management in government hospitals</li> <li>Evidence that (and number of): teachers (and schools) improve access to training and materials to promote inclusive, context-specific, COVID-safe hygiene to students and parents; hospitals, CHCs, and testing laboratories improve access to health and testing equipment, gender sensitive triage and isolation facilities, and supplies</li> <li>Number of vulnerable women, men, girls, and boys provided with accessible emergency assistance in conflict and crisis situations in Mindanao and other affected areas</li> </ul> <p>Evidence that DoH and other key Philippine Government agencies allocate resources for implementation of the international standard of 'minimum initial service package for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Filipino men and women reached with new or improved social protection programs, particularly vulnerable people</li> <li>Evidence of strengthened social protection systems, including improved targeting of the most vulnerable, and greater use of digital payment mechanisms</li> <li>Evidence of Australia enabling leaders to identify and act on reform opportunities, resulting in Philippine Government adoption of inclusive and significant reforms that aid COVID-19 response and recovery (e.g. transport systems for enhanced worker mobility)</li> <li>Number of senior Philippine Government staff implementing projects and actions that apply learning gained in Australia-supported short courses relating to COVID-19 response and recovery</li> <li>Evidence that key BARMM planning and service delivery systems are more inclusive, conflict-sensitive, and COVID-safe (e.g. education;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of Australia-funded advisory support contributing to inclusive, evidence-informed Philippine Government stimulus and economic recovery measures (e.g. credit guarantee facility; small business wage subsidy; digitisation of Philippine Government business processes; creation of one-stop shops; use of impact evaluations to inform COVID-19 response and recovery measures)</li> <li>Evidence of Australia supporting the Philippine Government to better understand COVID-19 socio-economic impacts, including on vulnerable groups (e.g. real-time monitoring of COVID-19 socio-economic impacts; industry-driven identification of workforce skill needs for economic recovery)</li> <li>Evidence of Australia supporting local government units to strengthen their preparedness for and resilience to economic shocks</li> <li>Number of female entrepreneurs provided with financial and/or business development services</li> </ul>



Program Plan	Health Security	Stability	Economic Recovery
	<p>sexual and reproductive health in emergencies' which includes gender-based violence protections</p>	<p>WASH; roads; GBV counselling and referral; conflict monitoring)            Number of additional girls and boys enrolled in school within BARMM            Number of strengthened, gender inclusive community-level conflict resolution mechanisms            Number of men, women, boys, and girls in conflict situations provided with basic services and economic opportunities            Philippines Internet Crimes Against Children (PICACC) agency is strengthened as a law enforcement hub combating online sexual exploitation of children            Evidence of stronger, gender sensitive, and socially inclusive child protection policies and systems for prevention, response and reporting of online sexual exploitation of children (and examples of results achieved)            No. women and girls' survivors of violence receiving services such as counselling (e.g. access to safe spaces)            Number of leaders and service providers promoting, responding to, and managing GBV issues in their community</p> <p>Evidence of research, technical advice provided by Australia improving food security and food systems' resilience to impacts of COVID-19 and other shocks</p>	<p>Number of women and men with increased incomes</p>
<p><b>Supporting Investments</b></p>	<p>Advancing Multilateral Partnerships for Economic Development (AMPED)            Education Pathways to Peace in Mindanao (PATHWAYS)            Sustaining Education Reform Gains</p> <p>Response and Recovery Assistance to the Philippines (RRAP) (PRC, ICRC, UNFPA, UNHCR)</p>	<p>AMPED            RRAP (PRC, ICRC, UNFPA, UNHCR, MRP)            Coalitions for Change (CfC)            Philippine-Australia Scholarships and Alumni Engagement Program            PATHWAYS            Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao (PCAM)            SaferKidsPH            Australian Federal Police</p> <p>Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)</p>	<p>AMPED            Research for Inclusive Development Initiative (3ie and UNFPA)            A Future that Works            RRAP (MRP, ICRC, UNFPA)            SHIELD Against Disasters &amp; Climate Change Program            Investing in Women            ISIP (UNDP)            Direct Aid Program</p>