

KEY UPDATES

RESPONSE TO FIRE IN KUTUPALONG BALUKHALI REFUGEE CAMPS ON 22 MARCH 2021

Previous reports can be accessed [here](#).

Overview

It has been two weeks since the devastating fire in Kutupalong Balukhali refugee camps (Camps 8E, 8W and 9) that left 48,300 individuals without shelter. According to findings from the Inter Sector Coordination Group's (ISCG) Rapid Joint Needs Assessment, the fire impacted 92,000* individuals. It also destroyed over 1,600 facilities including hospitals, distribution points, learning centres, and a UNHCR registration centre. UNHCR continues to respond to the needs of the affected population under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh and the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), working closely with IOM and other partner UN agencies, and NGOs.

Refugee volunteers remain the backbone of the response. From the onset of the fire, hundreds of volunteers mobilised to extinguish the fire, create fire breaks, take vulnerable individuals to safety, and find separated children. Over 300 UNHCR-supported refugee volunteers continue to actively support refugees in the fire affected camps as well as in other camps where refugees are taking shelter. For example, by accompanying affected refugees to health care facilities, assisting in building temporary shelters, clearing debris, and identifying and referring refugees with specific needs to relevant service providers. Volunteers including Community Outreach Members, Community Groups, Protection Emergency Response Unit (PERU) members, and refugee leaders are conducting awareness raising sessions on child protection risks such as child-trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV), fire safety and general assistance. They are also supporting refugees by providing shelter in their own shelters to displaced families and making hot meals for those in need.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, 35 volunteers who are part of a Community Group in Camp 3, visited Camp 8W and identified the need for hot food. Using rice from their own households, and chicken provided by UNHCR's partner BRAC, they cooked hot meals for 160 vulnerable refugees.

Photo: Volunteers deliver hot meals prepared for vulnerable fire affected refugees. © BRAC/2021



*Population residing around the fire affected area within a 100m buffer zone whose shelters were destroyed to create fire breaks and/or were accessing services and facilities in camps 8E, 8W and 9.

Key Updates

- From 31 March, UNHCR deployed its registration teams to key WFP distribution points in fire affected camps to re-issue refugee identity documentation that was destroyed in the fire. UNHCR and WFP are working together closely, utilizing community outreach mechanisms, to ensure refugees in affected camps as well as those who are sheltering in neighbouring camps are referred for new documentation. As of 6 April, 500 households have received family attestation documentation, which includes some 3,500 refugees.
- UNHCR is providing technical site planning and coordination support for the rebuilding of Camp 8E and 8W, in coordination with IOM. The first draft of the structural plans has been developed for both camps which include roads, fire breaks, slope stabilization, site development priority areas, and zoning proposals for shelter and WASH facilities. The development of the plans and consultations are ongoing.
- In UNHCR-managed camps, site management partners and safety unit volunteers have been on increased alert and are actively conducting outreach, follow-up and coordination on fire response preparedness and fire mitigation. This includes conducting drills in collaboration with camp-in-charge officials and law enforcement. Checking and refilling of fire extinguishers is conducted regularly.
- On 4 April, the UNHCR-led Community Health Working Group conducted training for supervisors of Community Health Workers. 100 supervisors attended the online training which was focused on fire safety and response in the community to strengthen capacity and mitigate measures across all camps. The supervisors oversee over 1,400 refugee and host community volunteer community health workers across all 34 camps.
- Together with partners OXFAM, NGO Forum and BRAC, more than 1,200,000L of water (benefiting some 10,000 refugees daily) and 11,000 jerry cans have been distributed to affected families since the outbreak of the fire. UNHCR continues to support the activities of the WASH sector including through the removal of faecal sludge. The construction of 28 emergency latrines and emergency tap stands has also been completed in the affected camps.



UNHCR and partner Action Aid consult with volunteer Community Outreach Members outside the interim community centre in Camp 9. © UNHCR/2021

A refugee is reissued with identity documentation that his family lost in the fire at a makeshift UNHCR registration point. © UNHCR/2021

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