

CAMP 5 FIRE INCIDENT

UNHCR Rohingya Response

9 January 2024



Refugees displaced by the fire have constructed temporary shelters. © Md. Jamal, Rohingya photographer

Situation Update

At 1:00 am on 7 January 2024, a massive and devastating fire broke out in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Flames blazed for over three hours in Camp 5, a UNHCR-managed camp, until Rohingya refugee safety unit volunteers (SUVs) trained on firefighting, local fire fighters and local authorities managed to contain the fire. 26 three-wheeler mobile firefighting units (MFFUs), provided by UNHCR, were deployed from different camps to the hilly, difficult-to-reach area. IOM was on standby with 18 additional MFFUs. The fire response was challenged by strong winds, scarcity of water in the dry season (the fire hydrants were soon depleted and many adjacent ponds were dry), access issues due to the lack of a road network in the hills, and resistance from households in affected blocks to break their shelters to create fire breaks. The fire spread through blocks A, B, C and D in Camp 5, and was stopped by fire breaks or open corridors between the camps before it could spread into Camps 6 and 8W.

Some 900 households were affected by the fire, comprising around 5,000 refugees, including 3,500 children. 972 shelters were damaged or fully destroyed. Displaced households have sought temporary shelter in the homes of relatives or other community members, or in community facilities in Camp 5 and adjacent camps. With the help of fellow community members, displaced households are already constructing temporary structures in the fire-affected blocks of Camp 5, to avoid sleeping in other shelters/facilities or under the open sky. A displacement tracker was activated on Day 1, in coordination with SCCCCM Sector, to track where people affected by the fire are temporarily staying, to ensure identification and provision of necessary support.

On 9 January, an initial site plan to rebuild the fire-affected blocks, developed by a multisectoral team led by UNHCR, was presented to the Camp 5 CiC. Preliminary decisions were made by the CiC on the division of labour by partners and WASH and shelter activity targets.


976

Shelters partially damaged or destroyed.


213

Latrines, bathing facilities, tube well and tap stand partially damaged or destroyed.


31

Community facilities damaged or partially destroyed.


887

Households temporary displaced

Impact and Response in Cox's Bazar



Site Management, Shelter, Non-Food Items & WASH

Impact:

- Some 900 refugee households (comprising 5,000 individuals) were displaced by the fire and sheltering across various camps.
- 976 shelters were affected, including 883 shelters totally destroyed and 93 partially destroyed.
- 31 communal facilities were damaged including:
 - 1 health facility
 - 15 learning centres

- 2 child-friendly spaces
- 13 mosques/religious schools
- 1 mobile firefighting unit (MFFU) hub was damaged.
- 213 WASH facilities (mostly latrines, bathing cubicles and hand washing stations) were damaged.
- No major damage was reported to the water network.
- 55 solar streetlights were damaged.

Response:

- On 9 January, the distribution of non-food items commenced with 131 households receiving basic items including hygiene supplies and menstrual hygiene management kits (soap, jerrycans, dignity kits, blankets, sleeping mats and assorted clothes). UNHCR and partners – including UNFPA, BDRCS (PMO), Save the Children, AMAN, AFAD – are actively mobilizing additional NFIs to the camp level to ensure full coverage of the affected families.
- The site clearance and safe disposal of debris is fully complete. This facilitates safety and access to the reconstruction process and community mobilization activities
- UNHCR and partners continued with community engagement and common messaging to affected families regarding planned assistance and response modalities.
- On 9 January, the initial site plan was presented to the CiC for input and endorsement. The proposed plan is the collaborative effort of an interagency and multisectoral response team to re-plan the fire-affected blocks, led by UNHCR. A revised site plan, incorporating feedback shared by the CiC, is to be presented to stakeholders by the CiC on 10 January.
- In a meeting chaired by the CiC on 9 January, preliminary decisions were made on the following:
 - UNHCR and Shelter partner NGO Forum will lead the reconstruction of 428 shelters, including associated household level site development works in collaboration with NRC, IFRC/BDRCS and Save the Children.
 - AFAD, in collaboration with other Turkish NGOs, will be responsible for the reconstruction of 550 shelters and minor site development.
 - UNHCR and NGOF will support major site development activities.
 - WASH partners NGOF, BRAC/DSK will reconstruct essential WASH facilities with strict adherence to Sector standards and government-approved designs.
 - A final decision on the division of labour and activity targets across WASH and Shelter partners will be communicated by the CiC on 10 January, based on partners' commitments as well as their assessed implementation capacity.

Challenges:

- Affected households have already started to construct temporary structures. This may cause challenges to site planning activity.
- Households are scattered across different camps and are collecting food from different sites, leading to difficulties in the distribution of hot meals.



Around 3,500 children have been affected by the fire. © Md. Jamal, Rohingya photographer



Health

Impact:

- One health facility was damaged by the fire.
- No casualties or major injuries have been reported.

Response:

- One Mobile Medical Team (MMT) closed today. Services will be integrated in the existing health facilities in Camp 5 (two primary health care centers and one health post). The second MMT, provided by Food for the Hungry, continued to operate, providing critical care to fire-affected refugees. 25 beneficiaries received treatment including four for first-degree superficial burns, and sixteen with cuts. Two patients were referred to the primary healthcare center for further care.
- 13 people were provided with mental health and psychological support (MHPSS) services by the Mobile Medical Team.

- Community health workers (CHWs) and community psychosocial volunteers provided basic first aid to 17 people and psychological first aid (PFA) to 233 people. CHWs also provided masks to 450 people.



Protection

Impact:

- Some 900 displaced households are sheltering in the homes of relatives, friends, and community facilities. There is increased risk of gender-based violence and other protection concerns, including theft as families have no safe place for their belongings.
- 200 children lost their homes and all their belongings. No child was reported severely injured.
- Two child-friendly spaces (CFSs) operated by BRAC were destroyed, while six CFSs remain functioning.
- Among the affected, 47 pregnant women and 31 women who had recently given birth were displaced by the fire.
- Urgent needs include winter clothing, footwear, shelter, drinking water, dry food, dignity kits and WASH facilities especially for girls and women.

Response:

- 25 affected households were supported with registration assistance to replace burnt/damaged documents, including 25 family attestations and 24 factsheets. Some individuals who still had their family attestation documents requested reprints of ID cards. However, UNHCR is not currently printing ID documents.
- UNHCR's Camp 5 protection focal point (PFP), together with the PERU team, continues protection monitoring, identification and referral of vulnerable cases and addressing the protection needs and concerns to the respective service providers.

- UNHCR's child protection (CP) partner TdH continuing response activities with five trained case workers and 11 trained CP volunteers mobilized to identify affected children in the area and assess child protection cases. 38 children (22 girls) were referred for medical treatment and Food. One lost child was reunited with caregivers.
- Psychosocial support (PSS) and psychosocial first aid (PFA) services were provided to 122 affected refugees (32 women, 26 men, 27 girls, 37 boys.)
- Eight refugees (2 boys, 1 girl, 2 men, 3 women) were referred to health partners for medical treatment and four persons (Two girls) were referred to WFP for food assistance.
- Dignity kits were distributed by the GBV social support team.
- Male role models, under the male engagement GBV prevention programme, helped affected households construct temporary shelters.
- Psychosocial support (PSS) counselors under GBV provided PFA to 28 people (17 women) in five households,
- Four SASA! Together activists provided PFA support, working alongside GBV prevention staff. Three female activists provided safe referrals to extremely vulnerable women and girls, following assessments by prevention staff and the PSS counselor. Three women and four adolescent girls were referred for health services. Two activists volunteered with site management teams to rebuild temporary shelters.
- 186 refugees were reached with awareness sessions on where to seek assistance for access to food; how to replace lost or burnt documents; what to do in case of shelter damage; information on health support, family reunification, GBV issues and other protection concerns. The UNHCR Helpline number was also disseminated.
- Six displaced households (comprising 24 people including 8 women, 1 elderly man and 10 children) continue to shelter at the BRAC-run community centre in Camp 5. BRAC staff have ensured that BRAC staff and COMs volunteers are available to support and monitor the families while alternative emergency shelter being arranged.
- Between 7-9 January, COMs from Camps 5, 6, 8W and 10 visited around 800 of the fire-affected families, identifying 137 persons with specific needs. The individuals have been added to the extremely vulnerable individual (EVI) list for priority distribution of emergency supplies.
- COMs volunteers conducted 25 awareness sessions on fire safety and post-fire support activities, reaching 132 people.
- Community group volunteers collected relief items from community members for distribution to fire-affected households, including clothing to 26 households, water pots for 15 households, floor mats for 20 households, and face masks for 120 individuals.
- On 8 January, UNHCR Protection partner BRAC conducted a rapid assessment to assess service-related GBV risks. Interviews were conducted with 35 fire-affected community members and 17 'local authorities' (e.g. mahjis, imams, CiC, NGO/UN workers, community volunteers, and representatives from women-led groups). Key findings include:
 - **Main risks for women and girls:** Lack of clean water, warm clothing, hygiene kits, toilet and bathing facilities; lost documents; lack of places to pray; dusty/unhygienic environment; feeling 'unsafe', and increased risk of sexual abuse in temporary shelters.
 - **Barriers in accessing GBV case management services:** Some women reported being blamed/beaten by their husbands for loss of valuables; others said fear of leaving

their belongings unattended in temporary shelters was leading to underreporting of GBV cases.

- **Factors that make women and girls feel unsafe:** Lack of toilets and proper lighting due to damaged solar streetlights and WASH facilities; increased fear of sexual harassment and vulnerability to criminal groups due to sleeping in the temporary shelters in the open air. Some respondents also said that displaced women and girls are more vulnerable to human trafficking and are leaving camp.
- **People identified at higher risk:** Respondents stated that people at higher protection risk included persons with disabilities, pregnant women, adolescent girls, gender-diverse people, lactating mothers, mothers of newborn babies, and extremely vulnerable individuals such as widows, elderly persons, and women-led households.
- **Additional security measures:** In the aftermath of the fire, additional security measures were implemented including patrols and watch groups comprising safety unit and site management volunteers, site management staff, CiC staff, members of APBN and Police, UNHCR staff, community volunteers and watch groups, mobile fire fighting units, and fire service members.
- **Community initiatives:** People have mobilized to help fellow community members displaced by the fire. Community-led initiatives include collecting and sharing resources (clothing, food, shelter, WASH facilities, and hygiene kits); participating in night patrols; and helping to construct temporary bamboo and tarpaulin shelters so that affected families are not sleeping under the open sky.
- **Other areas of impact:** Limited food supply provided by NGOs was reported, creating difficulties for women and girls to access proper nutrition. Maintaining menstrual hygiene is also a challenge, and many said they feel unsafe staying at relatives' homes.

Challenges:

- Many volunteers expressed concerns over the worsening safety and security in the camps when carrying out relief activities.

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