UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | Bangladesh

CAMP 5 FIRE INCIDENT

UNHCR Rohingya Response

10 January 2024

Partners mobilized blankets, clothing, soap, sleeping mats and other essentials. © Md. Moniruzzaman, Miraz Hossain/BDRCS

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. 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 adjacent camps.

Some 900 households were affected, comprising around 5,000 refugees, including 3,500 children. 972 shelters were damaged or fully destroyed. Fleeing for safety, refugees left behind many of their belongings, including identification documents, which may have perished in the fire or were later lost to theft. Displaced households have sought temporary shelter in Camp 5 and adjacent camps — with friends or relatives, in communal facilities, or in makeshift structures built on the remains of their previous homes. A displacement tracker was activated on Day 1, in coordination with SCCCM Sector, to track where people affected by the fire are temporarily staying, to ensure identification and provision of necessary support. The interagency Protection Emergency Response Unit (PERU) was also activated on Day 1 to provide basic first aid and search and rescue.

On 10 January, the site plan to rebuild the fire-affected blocks, developed by a multisectoral team led by UNHCR, received formal endorsement and approval by the Camp-in-Charge (CiC) of Camp 5.

The CiC recommended the urgent commencement of shelter reconstruction starting tomorrow, January 11, 2023, and requested humanitarian actors to temporarily pause activities in the fire-affected blocks to facilitate rapid clearing of debris and rebuilding efforts.

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

A site management volunteer surveys the wreckage of the camp. © Mir Mosharaf Hussain/UNHCR

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:

- NFI response: 419 households received 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. 317 households received dignity kits.
- Common messaging: UNHCR and partners continued with community engagement and common messaging to affected families regarding planned assistance and response modalities.
- Site planning: On 10 January, the plan to rebuild the fire-affected blocks received formal endorsement and approval from the CiC. The proposed site plan is the collaborative effort of an interagency and multisectoral response team, led by UNHCR. The CiC requested all relevant sectors to adhere to the approved plan.
- Shelter and WASH: On 9 January, preliminary decisions were made in a meeting convened by the CiC. The following decisions are currently under review and are yet to be confirmed:
    - 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, 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.

Community members are helping displaced families build temporary shelters. © Mir Mosharaf Hussain/UNHCR

Waiting for assistance. © Moniruzzaman, Miraz Hossain/BDRCS

Health

Impact:

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

Response:

- Mobile medical teams (MMTs): As healthcare services moved toward integration with the Camp 5 healthcare facilities, the MMT operated by partner Food for the Hungry (FH) ceased operations today.
- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS): The fire impacted three MHPSS volunteers and 83 former MHPSS programme beneficiaries. Of them, 14 were reached and received proper support, and the remaining were sheltered with their family and relatives. Psychologists were requested to track those latter cases and monitor their well-being status regularly.
- Community health workers (CHWs): On 10 January, community health workers and community psychosocial volunteers reached three people with basic first aid and 188 people with psychological first aid (PFA). CHWs referred seven people to health facilities in Camp 5 for better management.
- Sexual and reproductive health: One mother affected by the fire gave birth at home on 8 January. To ensure that the mother and child receive postnatal checkups, the mother and child were referred to FH's primary health clinic.

Around 3,500 children have been affected. © Mir Mosharaf Hussain/UNHCR

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:

- Registration: 9 affected households were supported with registration assistance to replace burnt/damaged documents, including 9 family attestations and 7 factsheets. Some individuals who still had their family attestation documents requested reprints of ID cards. However, UNHCR is not currently printing ID documents.
- Protection monitoring: UNHCR's Camp 5 protection focal point (PFP), together with the Protection Emergency Response Unit (PERU) team, continues protection monitoring, identification and referral of vulnerable cases and addressing the protection needs and concerns to the respective service providers.
    - The PERU team temporarily shifted outreach activities outside the fire-affected blocks in line with the Camp-in-Charge's request that humanitarian actors move their

activities out of the fire-affected blocks for the next two days, so that work teams can quickly clear up debris.
    - PERU reached 38 refugees (10 boys, 7 girls, 10 men, 11 women) with PFA.
    - PERU team members continue to conduct awareness raising on available services, reaching 18 individuals. Messaging includes how and where refugees could report family separation incidents, lost and missing children, lost/burnt registration documents as well as the information on accessing health, GBV, services for persons with disabilities and food services. In addition, UNHCR Helpline number was disseminated to the refugees.
    - UNHCR's PFP conducted advocacy with the CiC, expressing the concerns of the community about the continual presence of armed groups in the camp blocks, which aggravates the existing insecurity resulting frim of the fire. The CiC agreed to inform APBn about the concerns and UNHCR continues to follow-up.
- Child protection:
    - No new child protection cases were reported.
    - The complaints and feedback desk provided counselling and referral support to approximately 70 households.
- Gender-based violence prevention:
    - Male role models from the male engagement programme helped displaced families construct temporary shelters.
    - BRAC's psychosocial support counsellor, male role models and *SASA Together!* activists, reached 221 people (56 female) with PFA, direct referrals, help clearing debris, and awareness sessions on PFA and the referral pathway. The fire-affected refugees are struggling to cope: they expressed feelings of trauma over their lost homes and belongings, and anxiety that those who belongings (gas stove, cylinder, trunks, etc.) were stolen from their shelters after they fled the fire will not receive the necessary support.
- Community-based protection:
    - Six households displaced by the fire continue to take refuge at the BRAC-run community centre. Families received food supplied by WFP and blankets, floor mats, hand lamps and hygiene kits courtesy of BDRCS. One woman whose clothes were destroyed in the fire received a burka and some other clothing from BDRCS.
    - Community outreach members conducted 12 awareness sessions on fire safety and post-fire support activities, reaching 74 individuals.
    - BRAC staff continue to operate a helpdesk at the camp community centre, receiving feedback from affected persons and facilitating referrals to relevant service providers. Between, 7-10 January, 83 individuals have been supported via the helpdesk.
    - 15 COMs from Camp 5 continue to monitor displaced families seeking temporary shelter in other areas of the camp, providing key information and referrals.
    - COMs and community groups from Camp 5 are preparing their monthly community-based projects for January to be directed at families displaced by the fire. Proposed projects include clothes and floor-mat making for affected families, community-based psychosocial support groups, and communal cooking groups for single people affected.

Challenges:

- At the CiC's request to temporarily move activities out of the fire-affected blocks, CP partner TdH paused community outreach, psychosocial support, awareness-raising and case management activities in Camp 5, leading to gaps in services.
- Dignity kit distribution is inadequate. Some affected women said they have nowhere to wash their menstrual cloths, increasing health and hygiene risks.

- Toilets are insufficient, overcrowded and overflowing, heightening protection risks for women and girls.
- Some community focal points complained that the hot meals provided did not meet their standards.
- Many fire-affected women are unable to leave their temporary shelters, as their burkas were destroyed in the fire. This is making it more challenging for responders to identify them and properly assess their specific needs.
- Night time monitoring remains a challenge, as the safety and security situation in Camp 5 makes after-dark movement more challenging for protection volunteers to operate. Women and girls report being upset and terrified by numbers of unknown males roaming around the fire-affected blocks at night, fearing thieves and armed groups.

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