

## Emergency response to the fire in Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

08 January 2024



### Overview

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.

Over 800 households were affected by the fire, comprising around 5,000 refugees, including 3,500 children. 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. A displacement tracker was activated on Day 1, in coordination with SCCM Sector, to track where people affected by the fire are temporarily staying, to ensure identification and provision of necessary support.

## Response



## Site Management, Shelter, Non-Food Items (NFI) and WASH

### Impact

- Over 800 refugee households (comprising 5,000 individuals) were displaced by the fire and sheltering across various camps.
- 841 shelters were affected, including 748 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

- UNHCR is leading an interagency and multisectoral response team to replan the fire-affected blocks. The initial site plan is scheduled to be presented to the CiC by 9 January. Following government endorsement, UNHCR and shelter partners (NGOF, AFAD, IFRC/BDRCS, and Save the Children) and WASH partners (NGOF, BRAC/DSK) will



commence the reconstruction of shelters, WASH facilities, and associated site development, adhering to the government approvals.

- A displacement tracker was activated on Day 1 to ensure identification and provision of necessary support to fire-affected families temporarily sheltering in other homes or communal facilities in different camps.
- The site clearance and safe disposal of debris are progressing well, with expectations of full clearance by 9 January.
- Community engagement and common messaging to affected families regarding planned assistance and response modalities are ongoing.
- On 9 January, distribution of non-food items, including hygiene supplies and menstrual hygiene management kits, is scheduled to begin. Partners BDRCS (PMO), Save the Children, AMAN, AFAD are actively mobilizing these items to the camp level.

### Gaps/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 two different sites, leading to difficulties in the distribution of hot meals.



### Health

#### Impacts

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

## Response

- Medical mobile teams (MMTs) continued to provide critical care. 100 people (30 women) received comprehensive medical treatment for superficial first-degree burns, minor cuts, acute watery diarrhea, and other health concerns, in addition to 97 people treated by MMTs the previous day. Four referrals were made to primary healthcare centres.
- One sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) consultation was carried out by MMTs, as part of the integration of SRHS into the emergency health response, in addition two consultations the previous day.
- 392 people received psychological first aid from MHPSS teams, in addition to 581 people who received MHPSS services the previous day. 24 people identified with specific needs received focused specialized psychological care.



## Protection

### Impacts

- 887 households (comprising 5,000 people) were affected, including approximately 3,500 children. Displaced families 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. (Findings from a rapid assessment of GBV risks conducted by UNHCR protection partner BRAC will be shared in the 9 January report.)

- 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.
- Urgent needs include winter clothing, footwear, shelter, drinking water, dry food, and WASH facilities specially for girls and women.

## Response

- UNHCR's child protection (CP) partner TdH mobilized CP volunteers to identify affected children in the area and assess child protection cases. Three separated children (one girl) and two lost children (one girl) were reunited with caregivers, in addition to six lost children (three girls) reunited with their families on the previous day. One lost child is under the care of a TdH volunteer, and the tracing for the child's family continues.
- Psychosocial support (PSS) and psychosocial first aid (PFA) services were provided to 177 affected refugees (18 women, 16 men, 65 girls, 77 boys, one child with disability). One community volunteer has been stationed at the CiC office to receive new cases, in coordinating with the complaints and feedback response desk.
- 54 children (22 girls) were referred for medical treatment and food.
- Dignity kits, recreational materials, winter clothes, and blankets are planned to be distributed to affected children by UNICEF and SCI from available stocks.
- 117 heads of households 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.
- 36 community outreach members (COMs) helped identify people with specific needs to facilitate emergency supply distributions. Eight persons with disability, 47 pregnant women and 31 women who recently gave birth were identified and connected to relevant partners for further support. Community groups volunteers collected used blankets and distributed them to 55 families, while volunteers also provided psychosocial first aid to 43 affected families.
- Four families who sought emergency shelter at the CBP community centre on 7 January have since moved into the shelters of friends/relatives, while six families (24 individuals) remain.
- 22 affected households were supported with registration assistance to replace burnt/damaged documents, including 13 family attestations and 12 factsheets. Some individuals had their family attestation documents but requested ID cards. UNHCR is not currently printing ID documents.

## Challenges/Gaps

- Assessments are taking longer than expected, reportedly resulting from limited staffing due to the national election holiday on 7-8 January.
- Community members report fears of GBV risks faced by displaced women and girls staying in temporary shelters — especially when staying with fellow community members or relatives. They may also feel unsafe without male family members around.