

JOINT HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO FIRE INCIDENT IN ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMPS

Cox's Bazar | 6 April 2021

ISCG | INTER SECTOR COORDINATION GROUP



Photo: A refugee receiving a replacement SCOPE Card, allowing him to receive monthly food entitlements and non-food items. ©WFP/ Sayed Asif Mahmud / April 2021

On 22 March, 2021, a devastating fire broke out in three Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar killing 11 refugees and leaving some 10,100 households without shelter.

Two weeks after the fire, aid agencies and the Government of Bangladesh continue to work together to meet the immediate needs of the 48,300 individuals who lost their homes and personal belongings.

Refugees have been provided with hot food, safe water, medical assistance, temporary shelter and psychosocial support.

Significant challenges to assisting refugees remain; Rumors and misinformation are fuelling tensions between refugees and host communities, COVID-19 cases continue to rise, and shelter reconstruction work must take place urgently ahead of the monsoon season which begins next month.

KEY FIGURES



3

Camps affected



10,100

Households without shelter



48,300

Individuals directly affected

KEY OBJECTIVES OF AID RESPONSE

1 ASSIST

vulnerable people with immediate, lifesaving needs as a result of the fire.

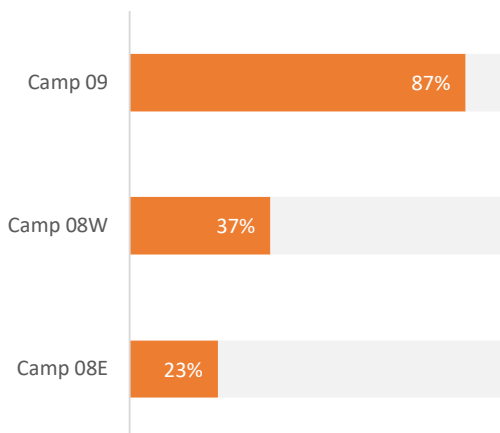
2 REBUILD

shelters and repair damaged facilities to restore essential basic services for vulnerable people in need.

3 PREPARE

and improve fire prevention mechanisms in the camps.

Estimated total affected households as a percentage of camp population (based on UNHCR February 2021 population figures)



KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF RESPONSE



Site Management Site Development Sector

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- A joint needs assessment conducted within 72 hours following the fire, determined that 10,100 households were left without shelters and 48,300 persons were directly affected by the fire. Key informant interviews by partners show that 28,000 people were affected in camp 9, some 13,493 people in camp 8W and 6,774 people in camp 8E.
- Site management actors continued to monitor the constantly evolving situation of inter-camp displacement across all camps. As of 5 April, approximately 12,500 persons from fire affected camps continued to reside outside their camps of origin following the fire. Since the fire, more than 32,500 individuals have returned to their camps of origin following the distribution of shelter kits.
- Site management partners, Camps-in-Charge (CiCs), and other humanitarian actors continue to coordinate at the camp level to ensure clear communication to different camp level sector focal persons as second waves of assistance and site planning activities take place in fire affected camps. Partners continue to advocate with camp administration for a coordinated approach across the fire affected camps, including the provision of documentation for refugees and referral to appropriate services.
- Site management teams are coordinating with other Sectors to replan the construction of shelters and facilities in fire affected camps. In coordination with CiCs, partners are advocating for immediate shelter reconstruction and expansion of road areas. Further site planning and construction will begin following this stage.



Health Sector

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- More than 4,000 refugees have been reached through medical consultations since the fire. Four Mobile Medical Teams remain deployed to help the injured and sick, both by providing direct assistance to the fire affected population and reinforcing capacity of health facilities that were affected by the fire, and other facilities faced with an increased patient load.
- Six health facilities were damaged or destroyed: these included one specialized clinic, one primary health care (PHC) facility, and one health post (HP) which were heavily damaged. Another PHC and HP were partially damaged. Of these facilities, all have resumed operations at least in part. A sixth facility, the Turkish Field Hospital, was heavily damaged and is currently undergoing reconstruction. The hospital's referral level services are being offered in partnership with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) at a different location, the BDRCS Field Hospital site. Plans for reconstruction of other damaged health facilities are under development, in consultation with relevant actors.
- Health sector partners provided the equipment and supplies, including medicines, to resume health services. The equipment includes 10 Interagency Emergency Health Kits, 17 Trauma and Emergency Surgery Kits, patient monitors, patient beds and personal protection equipment, among other items.
- Since the fire, 163 community health workers were mobilized to conduct community outreach in fire-affected camps, visiting over 17,000 households and reaching 26,000 refugees. Community health workers are providing support with health promotion, fire prevention, and first aid and assisting injured refugees with referrals to health facilities. Beginning on 4 April, the Health Sector conducted further capacity building of community health workers across all camps on fire safety and response at community level.
- Over 300 personnel continue to provide psychological first aid to refugees affected by the fire. In addition, staff from other Sectors, trained on psychological first aid, as well as primary health workers provided mental health and psychosocial support to refugees.



Photo: A community health worker counsels a refugee woman. © MUKTI Cox's Bazar/ Sofia Begum/ March 2021

- Face to face counselling is available for staff responding to the incident in English and Bangla. A mental health and psychosocial support hotline for service providers is also active.



Food Security Sector

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- Since 22 March, over 1,200,000 hot meals (lunch and dinner) have been distributed to households who lost their food and belongings in the fire. Hot food kitchens have been established in and around the camps to provide freshly cooked meals. Partners have distributed over 30,000 dry food snacks to complement main food assistance.
- As many people lost essential documents in the fire, SCOPE cards are being printed for all refugees in camps 9, 8E and 8W. 13,500 new SCOPE cards have been printed thus far. The cards are being distributed at NFI distribution points together with kitchen kits, hygiene kits, facemasks, and dignity kits. SCOPE cards have been distributed to 8,844 households in camps 9 and 8W so far.
- The distribution of LPG sets is ongoing. Following the distribution of kitchen sets and LPG, households can cook their own food and redeem their monthly e-voucher food assistance at WFP outlets. The Sector issued [recommendations to partners](#) on phasing out from hot meals provision once households can safely cook their own food.
- Food security and child protection partners coordinated to provide high energy biscuits to over 60 temporary Child Friendly Spaces. Over 120 host community households affected by the fire received in-kind food and livelihoods support. A joint rapid needs assessment has been completed.
- A joint environmental assessment of the fire-affected camps has been approved by the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), with data collection planned to commence by 8 April. The assessment aims to understand the impact of the recent fire on the environment, and provide the data required to provide evidence-based recommendations for environmental rehabilitation.
- Partners specializing in food security and water and sanitation along with other agencies, are coordinating to address solid waste management in fire affected camps.



Photo: Rohingya volunteer cooking lunch in temporary cooking facility for the emergency provision of cooked meals. © WFP / Sayed Asif Mahmud / April 2021.



Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Sector

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- In the first five days following the fire, WASH partners rapidly repaired the latrines in camp 9, which was worst hit by the fire. 53 percent of damaged latrines (some 600 latrines) are now functional for communal use by refugees. Refugees in camp 9 also now have access to 59 percent of pre-existing communal bathing facilities.
- To ensure access to safe and clean drinking water to refugees in camp 9, an average of 100m3 of water is being delivered each day by water trucks. Aqua tabs, along with messaging on their correct use, have been distributed to assist in providing access to safe water. Emergency water trucking is expected to cease within two weeks as viable water systems are re-established in the camp.
- Solid waste management systems have been temporarily restored and communal bins distributed, However the system is not yet fully effective and does not have capacity to handle the current food distribution waste.
- Refugees in camps 8E and 8W now have access to 75 percent of latrines in the camps. 32 percent of these latrines have been repaired by partners since the fire. Partners have also installed an additional 334 emergency latrines following the fire.
- Refugees can now access all bathing spaces, 42 percent of which were repaired by partners since the fire. An additional 165 emergency bathing spaces were constructed in the camps.
- Due to sufficient groundwater supply, the rehabilitation of tap stands, the distribution of aqua tabs and repairs to tube wells, and emergency trucking of additional water is no longer required.

- The landfill located in camp 20 Extension has received 1,705 m3 of multi-source waste since the start of the fire response on 23 March. As the current facility does not accept organic waste, alternative options for organic food waste disposal are being explored.



Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) Sector

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- 12,235 emergency shelter kits have been distributed to refugee households affected by fire in camps 8W, 8E and 9. Each shelter kit comprised of two pieces of tarpaulin, one bundle of rope, three pieces of muli (bamboo), two floor mats, two blankets, three facemasks, two mosquito nets, one solar light and three sandbags/jutebags. 143 affected host community households also received emergency shelter kits.
- Phase 1 of the distribution of emergency shelter material is complete. Aid agencies and Bangladesh authorities continue to discuss a potential shelter design for rebuilding shelters in the affected camps. Following a decision of the design, aid agencies will commence Phase 2 of the distribution of shelter material in line with the decision.
- 7,947 kitchen sets, containing stainless steel items such as cups, tablespoons, forks, plates and masks were distributed to refugee households in camps 9 and 8W.
- LPG cylinders and stoves were distributed to 4,202 households in camp 9, allowing refugees to cook their own food and not rely on distribution of cooked meals.
- 142 affected host community households living inside the camp boundaries, will receive cash assistance to repair their shelters. pending the results of a shelter assessment in the second week of April. Host community households will also receive training on shelter repair prior to receiving cash transfers during the last week of April.
- A Guidance Note and Packages for clothing and bedding (NFI) kit has been finalized¹, with distribution in camps 8W and 8E due to start from 11 April.



Protection Sector

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- In support of the protection response in camp 9, the most affected by the fire, the Sector mobilized an additional protection staff of different organizations with general protection, child protection, and GBV expertise. Merged with the staff already present in the field, 5 interagency teams with a total of 31 protection staff were created on April 4 and assigned by the Protection Focal Points to cover the different blocks affected by the fire through protection outreach. Between April 1 and 5, 4,786 refugees were provided with psychological first aid or psychosocial support, 2,863 with information on services available, 1,047 with protection counselling (mainly on registration-related issues), and 731 with medical referrals.
- In other camps affected by fire and secondary displacement, for example camps 6, 8W, 8E, and 12, Protection Focal Points and Protection Emergency Response Units (PERU) ensured urgent referral to different services providers to 2,634 refugees in need, including vulnerable individuals and identified their most pressing needs. Refugees have shared their concerns around a quick rehabilitation of the affected shelters with the teams due to the fast-approaching monsoon season.
- The Protection Sector completed the mapping of the emergency service providers who have re-established their presence in camps 9, 8E, and 8W; the document will be updated weekly and shared with the mobile teams for easy referrals.
- From 2-5 April, 85 community groups volunteers, including 36 women and female youth volunteers in camps 9, 11, 8E and 8W, provided psychological first aid, food and shelter related support, information on lost documents, access to healthcare, general assistance and food, support with carrying food, water and shelter kits, for 243 vulnerable refugees. Besides, 59 Community Outreach Members (47 males and 13 females) continued to support the fire response in camp 9 at food and NFI distribution points and disseminated information on services available, registration, and fire safety to the most vulnerable refugees while collecting feedbacks and referring refugees in need of assistance.
- In order to ensure all refugees have documentation as an identity document as well as to access services and assistance, four registration teams have been deployed at food distribution points in camps 9 and 17. In coordination with food security agencies, documents lost in the fire will be re-issued. Refugees taking shelter in other camps can also approach the distribution point to request for reissuance of documents.

¹ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/bangladesh/document/guidance-note-emergency-clothing-assistance-v1>

- The Age, Gender and Diversity Working Group partners carried out rapid needs assessments in camp 8E, 8W and 9 to reflect the needs of persons with disabilities and the elderly in the three fire-affected camps. The assessments help for more inclusive emergency response and reconstruction planning and improve warning systems and evacuation plans. As part of the response, 273 assistive devices were provided to refugees with disabilities and elderly persons affected by the fire.
- To understand housing, land and property related tensions, the Housing, Land Property Task Force conducted a joint rapid assessment in the host community living within camp boundaries who were affected by the fire. More than 68 percent (92 of 135) of respondents reported to have lost or damaged their legal identity and land related documents; of those 73 percent lost their national identity card/birth certificates and 59 percent lost land related documents. The Task Force is prioritising counselling on how to replace legal identity and land-related documents for affected host community members.

Child Protection Sub-Sector (CPSS)

- Tracing and reunification remain a priority due to the high initial numbers of separation of children from their families. 11 help and information desks have been established to support these efforts, and child protection hotlines remain active. 278 children were reunited with their parents between 1 and 6 April. Since the 22 March, a total of 1,914 children (990 girls and 924 boys) have been reunified with their families.
- Other basic assistance including distribution of clothes and toothbrushes has been provided to affected children.
- Five emergency temporary shelters for displaced children have been activated, with 20 children sheltered at present. Additionally, some children are staying in family based alternative care or with community members as shelters are reconstructed. Most children still separated are staying with extended family members and are in contact with caregivers, preferring to wait until returning to their families.
- Child protection focal points are present in both fire affected and camps hosting secondary displaced children to facilitate child protection issues referred by other sectors, as well as coordinating the overall camp-based child protection response.
- Psychosocial support is being provided to children in camps hosting secondary displaced children as well as those in the affected camps, with 2,292 children reached with psychosocial support between 1 and 6 April, reaching a total of 9,581 children (4564 girls and 5017 boys) since 22 March. Mobile outreach teams have delivered recreational activities to give children a sense of normalcy during the crisis and to mitigate risks of exploitation and provide basic psychosocial support.
- Partners are prioritizing the management of child protection cases following the fire, with a total of 138 cases opened since the 23 March (80 girls and 58 boys). From the 1 to 6 April, 50 cases were opened.
- Challenges include child labour, notably adolescent boys carrying heavy bamboo and scrap metal to help rebuild shelters, as well as children getting injured while playing in the debris from the fires. Children who have lost ID cards pose challenges to family reunification efforts, but this is being mitigated through support of UNHCR biometrics information.



Photo: A Rohingya caregiver shares information on his lost brother. © BRAC/ Md Junayed Bin Alam Fahim/ April 2021

Gender-Based Violence Sub-Sector (GBVSS)

- To meet the immediate hygiene needs of women and girls of reproductive age, 8,726 dignity kits and menstrual hygiene kits out of 20,038 available kits have been distributed so far.
- On two sites in camps 8E and 9 where a Women and Girl Safe Space and a Women-Led Community Centre previously stood before the fire, partners erected 10 temporary tents to continue providing essential services including emergency psychosocial support, midwifery support, case management services and referrals to health services. A third health facility in camp 9 which was damaged by the fire was also able to reopen to provide basic health care services and referral of gender based violence cases.

- To strengthen community outreach and psychosocial support, partners conducted door to door visits in the three fire affected camps, as well as neighbouring camps, to provide rapid mental health support and counselling to refugees.
- Through the PERU teams which have been activated to aid the response, gender-based violence focal points continued to provide messaging related to protection from gender-based violence to the displaced families and referrals to alternative women-friendly spaces, in nearby camps and to temporary service points set up within the affected camps.



Education Sector

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- A breakdown of the categories of 14,602 children affected by the fire are as follows:
 - 6,607 children between the ages of 4 and 6 years (3,342 girls and 3,265 boys)
 - 5,943 children between the ages of 7 and 9 years (2,978 girls and 2,965 boys)
 - 1,959 children between the ages of 10 and 12 years (860 girls and 1,099 boys)
 - 93 children over the age of 12 years (25 girls and 68 boys)
- Education partners have highlighted that access to learning facilities for children under the age of 9 has been most affected.
- A total of 207 learning facilities in the camps were either damaged or destroyed by the fire including:
 - learning centres,
 - community-based learning facilities, and
 - cross sectoral shared learning facilities.
- Partners have distributed 44,093 sets of educational books to affected children to help continue their learning.
- 66 learning centres continue to be used as emergency shelters for Rohingya refugee families affected by the fire in the camps.



Nutrition Sector

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- Nutrition partners continue providing essential curative life-saving and preventive services for all children and pregnant and lactating women in the fire-affected camps because they could potentially be vulnerable to malnutrition. All children under five and pregnant and lactating women are being screened for malnutrition and referred to the following nutrition programmes as needed: a) outpatient therapeutic programme for severe acute malnutrition, b) targeted supplementary feeding programme for moderate acute malnutrition and a blanket supplementary feeding programme for healthy children.
- Three temporary integrated nutrition facility sites are operational in the two camps continue to provide emergency nutrition services to affected persons. By 5 April, 15,209 children under five had been screened for malnutrition in the affected communities, and 8,433 had been children screened for malnutrition following a visit to the integrated nutrition facilities, cumulatively. Of those screened, 210 severely acutely malnourished children and 785 moderately acutely malnourished children were identified and admitted to nutrition support programmes.
- Other essential support provided by partners specializing in nutrition include the following:
 - Children from 6-23 months old and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are receiving hot porridge with additional nutrients each day.
 - Over 1,367 breastfeeding mothers within the reporting period have used Women Friendly Spaces to nurse their children, ensuring they continue to receive important nutrition in their early years.
 - 4,418 children are receiving a hot meal twice per day as part of complementary feeding. This is a critical part of the complementary feeding programme.
 - 224 female and male caregivers of children under the age of five who visited the integrated nutrition facilities, were provided with mental health and psychosocial support
 - Access to clean and safe drinking water is being provided for children under five as an emergency measure to help prevent malnutrition and prevent water-borne diseases.



*Photo: Temporary integrated nutrition facility in camp 8E.
 © SHED/Z. Rahman/ April 2021.*

- 20 Rohingya community nutrition volunteers from neighbouring camps have been deployed to camp 8E and 9 and helping scale up community engagement, by sharing information and awareness on nutrition-related services available.
- Two nutrition specialists trained in mental health and psychosocial deployed to fire affected camps to help nutrition partners provide mental health and psychosocial support to over 100 mothers of malnourished children under five.
- The delivery of early childhood care and development, and mental health and psychosocial services to refugees affected by the fire is a priority. Partners have provided early childhood care and development counselling sessions to 4,801 children and psychosocial support to 224 parents and caregivers between 1 and 5 April.



Communication with Communities Working Group

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- Partners have reached over 111,000 refugee and host community people through communication and awareness activities and outreach. More than 67,000 group information sessions were conducted in addition to 89 radio group listening sessions.
- Partners have conducted more than 200 information and awareness sessions with religious leaders, including mahjis and imams, from the fire affected camps. Religious leaders play an important role in disseminating timely, life-saving information within refugee communities. Partners have also engaged with community-based organisations and civil society organisations to share information with refugees and host communities.
- Refugee volunteers continue to support aid agencies disseminate key information to refugee communities. These volunteers continue to play an important role in mobilizing host community members to kickstart wider fire response activities, such as the construction of temporary shelters, and repairing and reinstalling WASH facilities, among others.
- Partners continued to develop new and updated key messages on fire including general safety, assistance and response, family reunification for parents and children, access to healthcare, fire safety and burn management, safe clean-up of fire-affected sites, access to food assistance, and lost documents (either of registration or food assistance), protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), among others.
- Based on these key messages, nine audio messages and public service announcements continue to be disseminated through different community engagement channels, including the Interactive Voice Response system, radio broadcasting, loudspeaker, megaphone, face-to-face communication, among others. Additional messages and communication materials are being developed in line with the evolving context and needs.
- Rumor and misinformation are being tracked through a standard tool and an analysis of ongoing rumors and unverified information has been shared with key humanitarian actors for further action. Further information and analysis on rumors is available²
- Agencies specializing in communicating with communities continue to conduct a campaign on fire prevention and preparedness across all 31 fire non-affected camp and host communities.



Photo: Religious community leaders receive cascade training on disseminating key messages. © UNICEF/SHED/ March 2021



Logistics Sector

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- Assets including light towers, generators, mobile storage unit, ablution units, prefabs and medical chest refrigerators have been loaned to aid agencies for the response.
- The Logistic Sector, with partners, has transported 673 m3 (170 mt) of relief items using 73 trucks on behalf of nine organisations.

² <http://www.shongjog.org.bd/news/i/?id=d6ea30a3-be19-4747-bb90->

- Madhu Chara and Balukhali logistics hubs remain on standby for urgent requests by aid agencies. Sufficient storage availability remains in the four logistics hubs in Cox's Bazar District. Transportation is available on request to the Sector.
- Skilled laborers are on standby at the Madhu Chara logistics hub.

*Photo: Volunteers set up a mobile storage unit. © WFP/
Paul Karmoker/ March 2021s*



Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS)

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- Two additional sites in camp 9 have been provided with data connectivity, allowing humanitarian actors to connect to an online bio-metric server to assist with the re-issuance of key identification documents for refugees.
- ETS also bolstered internet connectivity at the Madhuchara logistics hub to assist humanitarian actors to conduct emergency fire response activities and communicate effectively with partners.

Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA)

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- Female and male volunteers continue to support the humanitarian community's fire response in the camps, including the distribution of food and aid items, assisting those in need of medical care, and disseminate information services, especially to affected women.
- Six Gender Field Officers continue to work with refugee outreach volunteers to conduct community outreach and distribution of dignity kits, as well as providing coordination support with the CiC Office and, other Sectors and identifying gender issues to include in the ongoing needs assessments. They are also linking women, pregnant women, and single mothers with relevant service providers.
- A rapid needs assessment conducted in Camp 9 identified the emergency needs of women (especially female head of households, single mothers, pregnant women, lactating mothers, adolescent girls, people with disabilities, and older persons). The assessment identified several items which are urgently needed for women and adolescent girls specifically, including dignity kits, clothes and Abayas to allow them freedom of movement, ability to use WASH facilities, and access information on health, protection and other services. Mosquito nets, cooking utensils and mattresses were other top requested items.

CHALLENGES

- Humanitarian work in general including fire response activities has been impacted by the increasing rate of COVID-19 in Bangladesh and the resulting lockdown imposed by the Government of Bangladesh. The aid community is adhering to the guidance of the Government during the lockdown measures and is limiting the movements to the camps to essential missions only.
- Strong wind and rainstorms on 4 April caused further damage to the temporary, ad hoc shelters that have been constructed in the three affected camps. Slope stabilization measures, which were significantly damaged in the fire, need to be urgently reinforced in hilly areas of the camps which are at high risk of landslides following heavy rain.
- The monsoon and cyclone season is expected to start in Bangladesh in the coming weeks. Aid agencies and the Government have a small window of time to mobilise critical shelter repairs and site planning before inclement weather conditions hamper work in the camps.
- Persistent rumors and/or misinformation continues to create tension and mistrust between the Rohingya refugees and members of the local community, impacting aid efforts on the ground.

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