Strengthening Fire Response Capacity in the Rohingya Camps

Key Highlights: Data May 2018 to Dec 2025

- **2,425** Total Number of Fire Incidents Recorded
- **1,097** Number of People Injured
- **19,148** Number of Shelters Damaged
- **37** Number of People Death
- **20,749** Number of Households Affected
- **352** Number of People Missing
- **100,823** Number of Individuals Affected
- **3,691** Number of Facilities Damaged
- **60,220** Number of Individuals Displaced
- **83** Number of Fire Incidents Recorded in **December 2025**

1. Background and Context

Fire remains one of the most persistent and destructive hazards in the Rohingya refugee camps. Between May 2018 and December 2025, a total of 2,425 fire incidents were recorded, affecting over 100,000 individuals, damaging more than 20,000 shelters, and causing significant loss of life, displacement, and infrastructure.

Earlier years, particularly 2021 and 2023 were marked by large-scale fires that spread rapidly through densely **populated** camps, destroying thousands of shelters and affecting entire camp sections at once. In contrast, 2025 represents a notable **shift**: while fire incidents have increased, no massive fire events were recorded, and overall impact dropped sharply compared to previous years.

This improvement reflects years of sustained donor investment and continuous operational efforts by UNHCR, IOM, and partners, coordinated through the SCCCM Sector and EPR Working Group.

2. Improved Fire Response Capacity and Reduced Impact in 2025

2.1 Evidence from December 2025 Fire Incidents

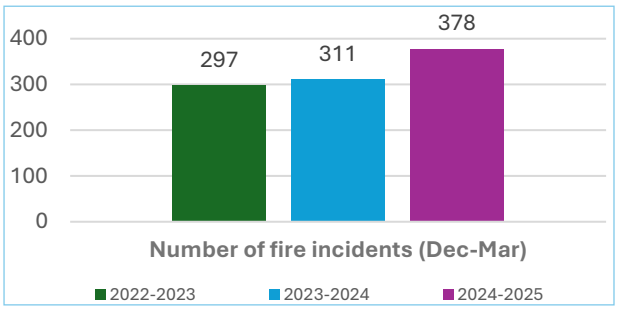
In December 2025, several fire incidents occurred specially on 25th, 26th and 28th December 2025 Kutupalong RC, Camp 4, and Camp 24 (Tekna). Despite occurring during the high-risk dry season, the overall humanitarian impact remained limited.

In UNHCR-managed camps, four fires were reported within 72 hours (from 25th December 2025) but no fatalities or injuries were recorded. Only two household shelters were significantly damaged, affecting 20 individuals, and one health facility was lost in Camp 4. Fires were contained within approximately 20 minutes through rapid community-based response.

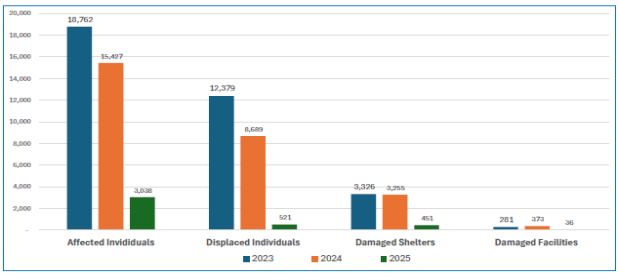
In IOM managed camps, 32 fire incidents were reported with the biggest in Camp 24, a fire affected 43 shelters and 239 individuals, with one injury and no fatalities. Trained Disaster Management Unit (DMU) volunteers and community members responded immediately using mobile firefighting equipment, preventing wider spread.

These outcomes contrast sharply with earlier years, when similar incidents escalated into camp-wide disasters, displacing thousands.

Seasonal Fire Incident Trend (2020-2025)



Fire Risk Analysis: Yearly Comparison 2023-2025



2.2 Key Investments that made the Difference

The reduced impact of fires in 2025 can be directly linked to long-term, donor-funded improvements in preparedness and response, including:

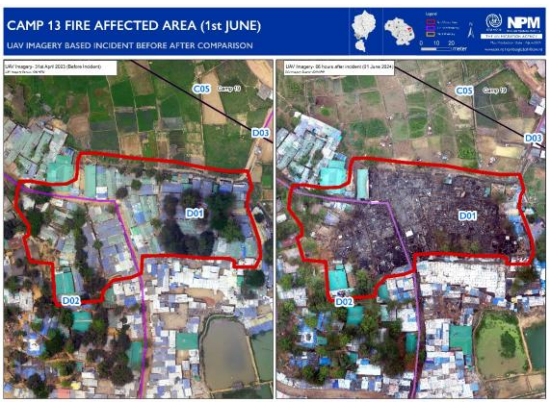
- Community-based fire response teams involving thousands of trained SMS and DMU volunteers deployed across camps. Regular drills, simulations, and refresher trainings improved reaction time and coordination.
- Firefighting infrastructure and equipment such as pre-positioned Mobile Fire Fighting Units (MFFUs), water tanks and pumps, and tools at camp level. Also, improved access routes enabling Fire Service & Civil Defence (FSCD) to support quickly.
- Early containment and coordination mechanisms through strong coordination between UNHCR, IOM, CiCs, FSCD, APBN, and SCCCM partners. Use of incident reporting systems and rapid damage verification to guide response.
- Preparedness and anticipatory actions including community awareness campaigns reduced spread.

Integration of fire risk analysis into site management and EPR planning.

As highlighted in the Fire Risk Analysis (EPR WG, Dec 2025), **2025 is the first year since 2020 with no massive fire incidents,** confirming that improved response capacity is effectively reducing catastrophic outcomes, even as incident frequency remains high.

Fire Drill in Rohingya Camp

Building Emergency Shelter after the fire incident



Before and after Fire incident impact, Camp 13, 2024

Mobile Fire Fighting Unit in Rohingya Camp

3. Continued Investment Remains Essential

3.1 Fire Risk is Structurally High

- Camps remain densely populated
- Flammable shelter materials
- Fire incidents continue to peak during the dry season (December to March).
- 683 fire incidents were recorded in 2025, only slightly higher than 2024 (640 fire incidents), indicating that risk has not diminished only impact has.

Without sustained investment, the gains achieved could be rapidly reversed.

3.2 The Case for Fire-Resilient Shelter Materials

Current shelters, still rely heavily on combustible components. Large-scale fires in earlier years demonstrated that shelter materials are a critical driver of loss and cost escalation.

Investment is urgently needed to:

- Expand use of fire-retardant and fire-resilient materials.
- Invest in "Integrated Settlement Planning/Multi-Sector Settlement Planning" that looks at fire risk mitigation through improve spacing, compartmentalization, and fire breaks and adaptation by addressing access for efficient evacuation.
- Reduce long-term replacement and reconstruction costs caused by repeated fire damage.

3.3 Sustaining Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR)

The effectiveness seen in 2025 depends on continuous funding, not one-off investments. EPR capacity requires:

- Ongoing training and retention of volunteers
- Maintenance and replacement of firefighting equipment
- Regular risk analysis, simulations, drills and preparedness planning
- Pre-positioned contingency stocks to enable rapid life-saving response
- Investments in community infrastructure that mitigate the impact of fires

As demonstrated by the Fire Risk Analysis, when preparedness weakens, fire impact escalates exponentially, both in humanitarian terms and financial cost.

4. Conclusion:

The experience of 2025 and particularly December 2025, clearly demonstrates that donor investments work. Fires still occur, but they no longer routinely become large-scale disasters. Faster response, stronger community capacity, and better coordination have saved lives, protected infrastructure, and reduced displacement.

The SCCCM Sector, together with UNHCR, IOM, and partners, extends its sincere gratitude to donors we urge continued support for these proven interventions whose sustained support has made these outcomes possible. At the same time, the data is unequivocal: fire risk remains high, and we urge continued investment in fire-resilient shelters and EPR capacity which is essential to protect these gains.