**Emergency Preparedness and Response Needs in Cox’s Bazar Refugee Camp**

**Background:**

Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, stands as the host to the world’s largest refugee camp, sheltering a population close to 1 million (976,507) seeking refuge from conflict and persecution. The camp, marked by its dense population and precarious conditions, faces an array of multi-hazard disasters, including fires, floods, landslides, and cyclones. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) oversees responsibility for half of the camp’s population (493,481) and has been deeply engaged in bolstering emergency preparedness and response since 2017. Despite concerted efforts, the recent surge in fire-related incidents affected thousands of refugees directly and indirectly underscores the imminent need for reinforced measures to safeguard lives and property.

Furthermore, in 2018, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism conducted an assessment of fire prevention, preparedness, and response capacities in Cox’s Bazar ([Final Report: Fire Safety Strategy, Rohingya Refugee Camps](https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/final-report-fire-safety-strategy-rohingya-refugee-camps-cox-s-bazar-area)). This evaluation provided a comprehensive overview, offering valuable recommendations to address existing gaps and enhance resilience. While several measures have been implemented in response to these recommendations, the dynamic operational environment necessitates exploring new ideas in efforts to ensure the effectiveness of emergency response strategies.

**Situation Overview:**

Since January 2021, Cox’s Bazar has been ravaged by 1050 fire-related incidents ([Daily Incident Dashboard](https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiYWNhNTY5MzItNmYzZS00YWE0LWE0MDgtYTQ0OTYzMGU5ZGYwIiwidCI6IjE1ODgyNjJkLTIzZmItNDNiNC1iZDZlLWJjZTQ5YzhlNjE4NiIsImMiOjh9)) impacting tens of thousands and causing extensive destruction to shelters and vital infrastructure. Particularly notable are the devastating fires that struck camps 9, 8E, and 8W on 22 March 2021, camp 16 on 9th January 2022, and Camp 11 on 5th March 2023, collectively affecting close to 0.1 million individuals and resulting in significant damage to shelters, site development, health, WASH infrastructure, and the natural environment. The demographic landscape further complicates matters, with approximately half of the camp’s inhabitants being minors, accentuating the urgency for tailored and robust solutions.

The demographic composition further exacerbates the challenges faced, with approximately half of the camp’s inhabitants being minors, placing a significant number of small children and newborns at heightened risk. With an estimated 30,000 babies born each year, the vulnerability of the population to fire-related incidents is compounded, necessitating urgent and tailored interventions to ensure their safety and well-being.

The topographic formation of the camp and its nature as a self-settled camp with minimal site planning yet largely hilly and congested continues to expose the camps to fire outbreaks that easily spread from one shelter to another due to insufficient fire breaks amplifying the magnitude and impact of fires whenever the outbreaks occur.

Amidst these dire circumstances, the need for comprehensive and effective emergency preparedness and response measures is paramount to mitigate the impact of disasters and safeguard the lives and future of Cox’s Bazar’s inhabitants.

**Request for Support:**

In light of the escalating challenges, IOM seeks a strategic partnership with INSARAG to fortify emergency preparedness and response capabilities in Cox’s Bazar. The proposed areas of focus include:

1. **Review and Strengthen Fire Preparedness Measures:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing fire safety strategies and recommend enhancements to effectively mitigate risks.
2. **Enhance Community Response Techniques:** Evaluate community-level fire response techniques and empower residents with the requisite skills to promptly and safely manage fire incidents.
3. **Develop Incident Command System (ICS):** Collaborate with the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense (FSCD) to establish an efficient Incident Command System, facilitating organized and coordinated responses by community volunteers.
4. **Identify Gaps and Recommend Strategies:** Undertake a thorough gap analysis, sharing expertise and devising strategies to bolster ongoing efforts in fire protection, preparedness, and response.

The imperative to enhance emergency preparedness and response capabilities in Cox’s Bazar cannot be overstated. With INSARAG’s invaluable support, we aim to reinforce existing measures and cultivate resilient communities adept at confronting diverse hazards effectively.