

Global Fire Safety Community of Practice (CoP)

Hosted by Kindling and Global Shelter Cluster

Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 3 June 2025

Time: 14:00-15:30 (GMT+2)

Location: Online (Teams Webinar)

Agenda

14:00 -14:05 | Welcome, house rules and CoP ethos

14:05 -14:10 | Mapping of attendees by countries and sectors (via Mentimeter)

14:10 -14:25 | Overview of the CoP, recap of the 2023 GSC Report: *The State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements: A story of unintended consequences*, and session framing

14:25 -14:50 | Panel discussion

14:50 -15:15 | Q&A session and reflections

15:15 -15:30 | Closing remarks and next steps

Attendance: The meeting was well-attended, with 69 participants from various sectors joining the call from around the world (as illustrated in the Mentimeter map below).



The organisations represented in this meeting included the following:¹

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- Kindling
- Save The Children
- ShelterBox
- Africa Fire Mission
- Shelter Centre
- CARE International

¹ If you attended the session and your organisation is not represented here, please let us know and we will add it. We are basing this list off what was shared in the chat and in introductions, so we apologise in advance if there are any gaps.

- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- International Fire Safety Standards (IFSS) Coalition

Private Companies

- Lumkani
- Arup
- Fire Killa Extinguishers

Academic Institutions

- University of Greenwich - Centre for Safety, Resilience and Protective Security
- University of Stellenbosch - Fire Engineering

Humanitarian Organisations

- International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria

Government Institutions and Government-Owned Entities or Programmes

- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), United Kingdom
- Dubai Airports, Dubai
- Working on Fire (WoF), South Africa
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services, United Kingdom
- Mossel Bay Municipality: Fire Rescue and Disaster Management Services, South Africa
- Lilongwe Fire Brigade, Malawi

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting was to reflect on the challenge of institutionalising fire safety in humanitarian settings in our rapidly changing global context. This included:

- Revisiting the strategic recommendations from the [“State of Fire Safety” and “Fire Risk Reduction Guidance” for the Global Shelter Cluster](#).
- Assessing what is feasible in the short, medium and long term.
- Considering alternative approaches to advancing fire safety amidst ongoing institutional and operational challenges.

This session marked the first 2025 convening of the Global Fire Safety CoP, which now sits under the newly launched Global Shelter Cluster Technical Working Group. During the session, Danielle Antonellis (Kindling) noted that the slower start to this year’s gathering, compared to the more frequent convenings in 2024, was due to the reorganisation process involved in establishing the Technical CoP and aligning its subgroups. Kindling, as the host of the Fire Safety CoP, continues to facilitate this community within a broader global structure that is aimed at strengthening collaboration across different thematic areas. This repositioning marks a new phase. While we will continue to focus on sharing insights to advance fire safety for all, now we will be leveraging the Global Shelter Cluster’s infrastructure to build cross-sector momentum and integrated action.

Overview of the Meeting:

1. (Re)Introduction to the CoP

This meeting was facilitated by Kindling, a non-profit NGO registered in the United States and South Africa with a mission to make fire safety accessible to all, through research, advocacy, learning and practice.

Danielle opened the session with a reaffirmation of the CoP's shared ethos: respect, humility, collaboration, and mutual learning. She contextualised the session as part of a broader effort towards:

- Shifting fire safety from reactive to proactive.
- Elevating community-led approaches.
- Building intersectoral momentum despite funding challenges.
- Institutionalising fire safety through frameworks, policy, design, and training.

Following these opening remarks, Danielle gave a brief re-introduction to the Fire Safety CoP, reflecting on its evolution and themes explored thus far (e.g., fire safety in humanitarian settings; learning from safety programmes in Lebanon; the role of data in improving fire safety; electricity and energy sources; and community and human-centred fire safety). She then mentioned future potential themes for exploration, such as understanding fire spread through experiments; burn prevention and treatment; community responses to fire; engaging with local fire services; and fire risk assessments.

2. Revisiting the State of Fire Safety Report

Danielle referred attendees to the 2023 Global Report, titled *The State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements: A Story of Unintended Consequences*, as a framing tool for this meeting.

"Fire risk in humanitarian settings largely emerges from the intersection of a lack of data/evidence and knowledge, the physical environment, and the policies, systems and processes which check and implement lines of responsibility," said Danielle. She then recapped the core issues explored in the report, emphasising the following:

- Fire safety is not just a technical issue but also reflects the intersecting gaps in data, infrastructure, energy access, land tenure, community engagement, and more.
- There is fragmented responsibility for fire safety across sectors and actors, making integration more complex but necessary.
- Fire risk is often de-prioritised due to humanitarian settings being seen as "temporary".
- Affected communities are disempowered from leading fire safety planning and strategy.
- There is often insufficient funding, data, policy attention and evaluation for fire risk.
- Strategies often lack intersectionality, ignoring gender, disability, age and other social identities.

From here, strategic recommendations from the report were shared under the following themes: Institutional Foundations, Knowledge & Capacity, and Programming & Practice. These recommendations emphasised the institutionalisation of fire safety across policy and operational frameworks; the promotion of collaboration across sectors and organisations; the creation of fire incident and safety reporting mechanisms; knowledge and capacity-building and the expansion of research; standardised fire risk assessments across contexts; the development of context-specific Fire Risk Reduction (FRR) programmes; engagement with non-traditional actors (firefighters, insurers, engineers, community leaders); development of appropriate fire safety standards; and the integration of fire safety into broader Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and resilience frameworks.

Appendix A provides more details on these strategic recommendations.

3. Panel discussion

For the panel discussion, five individuals were invited to bring their wealth of experience on varying issues around fire safety in global settings in their respective organisations:

- Mazen Yachoui – Director of Program Development and Quality, *Save the Children Lebanon*
- Phil Duloy – Humanitarian Response Advisor, *Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)* (speaking in a personal capacity)
- Liz Palmer – Global Construction Lead, *Save the Children International*
- Irene Mugambwa – CCCM, Shelter and NFI Sector Coordinator, *International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Nigeria*
- Jim Kennedy – Independent Shelter and Settlement Practitioner & Board Chairman, *Kindling*

For this part of the meeting, the panellists were invited to reflect on three core questions:

- How is the humanitarian environment changing, and what does this mean for fire safety?
- Why does fire safety remain difficult to institutionalise?
- What practical actions can improve fire safety across sectors?

Speaker 1: *Mazen Yachoui – Director of Program Development and Quality, Save the Children Lebanon*

Mazen kicked off the panel discussion by emphasising the need to integrate fire safety across child protection, education, health and shelter services, even in instances where funding is limited. Mazen then shared Save the Children’s structured approach to fire safety in Lebanon, which is organised around eight pillars, namely:

1. *Duty of Care & Risk Management*: This entails ensuring the safety of staff, children, and communities in all operational sites (offices, shelters, learning spaces, etc.), and conducting fire risk assessments regularly and before programme implementation.
2. *Policy Development & Enforcement*: This entails developing and enforcing organisational fire safety policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs), and integrating fire safety into safeguarding, child protection, and health and safety policies.
3. *Programmatic Integration*: This entails embedding fire safety components into shelter/water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)/health programmes (safe construction and materials), education programmes (school evacuation plans), and protection programmes (community awareness), while ensuring fire safety is considered in project design, budgeting, and reporting.
4. *Training & Capacity Building*: This entails training staff, partners, and community volunteers on fire prevention, emergency response and evacuation, and the use of fire extinguishers, as well as conducting child-friendly fire safety education sessions.
5. *Infrastructure & Equipment*: This entails equipping all facilities (offices, centres, safe spaces) with fire extinguishers, alarms, exit signage, and evacuation maps, ensuring proper cooking and heating infrastructure, and regularly inspecting and maintaining fire safety equipment.
6. *Community Engagement & Accountability*: This entails engaging with communities in developing and practising fire response plans, including fire safety messaging in awareness campaigns and child-friendly communications, and responding to fire-related complaints or incidents transparently and effectively.
7. *Coordination & Advocacy*: This entails coordinating with Civil Defence and fire departments for inspections and training, aligning with other INGOs and clusters (e.g., Shelter, Protection, WASH) for consistency, and advocating for stronger fire safety regulations in humanitarian shelters and informal settlements.
8. *Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)*: This entails monitoring compliance with fire safety protocols at the field level, tracking and reporting incidents, near misses, and lessons learned, and using findings to update practices and improve preparedness.

Mazen noted that deteriorating economic conditions and funding limitations have increased vulnerabilities and oftentimes deprioritised fire safety. However, past experiences with fire incidents in Lebanon's informal settlements continue to highlight the need for maintaining these efforts.

Speaker 2: *Phil Duloy, Humanitarian Response Advisor, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (speaking in a personal capacity)*

In his personal capacity, Phil reflected on structural and funding shifts in the humanitarian system and how these affect the institutionalisation of fire safety. He noted that reductions in official development assistance and the potential merging of humanitarian clusters, such as CCCM Shelter in housing, land and property, may reshape responsibilities and coordination mechanisms. Within this context, Phil pointed to possible openings for integrating fire safety into revised standards, such as in the Sphere Handbook and minimum standards in camp management.

Phil suggested that this reform may create new opportunities to institutionalise fire safety if actors are prepared for action. Here, a powerful advocacy lens was proposed, suggesting that fire safety be identified as a human right (as an extension of the right to life and adequate housing), as it intersects with multiple human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Phil advocated for reframing fire safety in this way as a means to create new policy pathways. He also pointed to the insurance industry as a source of tools and incentives that could be adapted to better quantify and communicate fire risk.

Speaker 3: *Liz Palmer, Global Construction Lead, Save the Children*

Liz began by making the case that fire safety must be built into the physical and institutional fabric of humanitarian work. Building on Mazen's presentation, she reinforced that fire safety needs to be embedded into plans at all levels, spanning from national to school-level plans. She noted that WASH, DRR, child protection and climate adaptation strategies often fall short when it comes to including fire safety, despite their alignment.

Liz suggested that the challenge is not just technical but also depends on political and institutional adoption. She identified measuring prevention as one of the key challenges, specifically on how FRR impact can be quantified when success often looks like the absence of disaster. Furthermore, Liz described practical steps that can be aligned with existing responsibilities, by referencing the fire safety guidance developed through the Global Shelter Cluster and Kindling, as a helpful foundation for integrating these efforts across teams and themes.

Speaker 4: *Irene Mugambwa, CCCM/Shelter/NFI Sector Coordinator, IOM Nigeria*

Irene shared insights from the IOM's fieldwork in refugee and displaced community settings in Nigeria, where fire incidents dropped from 111 in 2024 to 33 so far in 2025. She emphasised that this reduction was not due to new resources but rather to increased community awareness and behavioural change; stating the possibility that "people became more careful when they realised aid might not come after the fire".

Irene highlighted that in locations without direct partner presence, data is drawn from government sources. Here, Irene spoke to the importance of shifting the ownership of prevention to affected populations and warned that limited data and fragmented response capacity hinder long-term recovery and preparedness, ultimately urging for more localisation,

proactive risk messaging, and transparency. She also referenced the ongoing support from Global Shelter and CCCM clusters to strengthen Nigeria's fire risk reduction strategy.

Speaker 5: *Jim Kennedy, Shelter & Settlements Consultant, Chair of Kindling Board*

Jim reflected on how humanitarian site planning practices, often rooted in decades-old public health policies, may not adequately account for fire risk in current contexts. He suggested that fire safety is still treated as peripheral in spatial design and proposed exploring how planning might shift if fire risk reduction were placed at the centre.

He raised practical considerations, such as evacuation planning for children and livestock, and how market placement around schools might increase fire exposure. Jim emphasised that repositioning fire safety as a core planning concern could reshape assumptions about shelter spacing, infrastructure, and the roles of camp managers and vendors. Rather than critique, his comments invited a reimagining of settlement design to reflect evolving risk realities.

4. Q&A and Reflections

In response to the panel discussion, the CoP participants shared further insights and asked questions. One participant reflected on the complexity of developing a meaningful global fire safety strategy by highlighting that fires manifest in diverse and "wicked" typologies, ranging from accidental and technical fires to political, militarised, cultural, and climate-induced ones. They stressed that "a fire is more than a flame," and without deeper contextual interpretation, universal fire safety may remain out of reach.

Another participant supported this view, noting that framing fires as "accidental" often hides the more layered social, behavioural, or political factors behind them. They urged for more nuanced recognition of the causes and impacts of fires in humanitarian and informal settings.

Another participant noted a behavioural insight from the UK that during firefighter strikes, fewer fires occurred, suggesting that when people perceive they are at higher risk due to limited emergency response, they behave more cautiously. This sparked discussion on the human factors in fire prevention. Irene responded that in North-East Nigeria, where humanitarian presence has decreased in some areas, communities began taking more responsibility for fire prevention. She showed how this change has coincided with a decrease in reported incidents. In the chat, another participant echoed the UK observation and questioned whether increased caution during firefighter strikes reflects a broader trend in human behaviour.

Another participant shared a provocative anecdote from their research in one settlement, where a fire occurred annually and was always stopped after burning five homes, regardless of firefighter intervention. This phenomenon, linked by residents to black magic, underpinned how socio-cultural beliefs can influence perceptions, challenging purely technical interpretations.

Another participant raised a question about whether fire risk reduction strategies are adequately capturing how many fires have been prevented. They pointed out that incident

reporting and evaluation mechanisms are imperative but remain underdeveloped in many humanitarian contexts. In a response to this comment, Irene shared that, in Nigeria, CCCM partners routinely collect fire incident data from operational areas, though coverage gaps exist where no partners are present, leading to supplementary data being sourced from government entities.

Several participants further reiterated the importance of capturing fire prevention successes through proper monitoring, evaluation, and reporting frameworks. They stated that without this, risk reduction efforts remain invisible and undervalued by donors and policymakers.

Key Takeaways:

1. Fire safety must be integrated across sectors.
2. The institutionalisation of fire safety faces significant structural and political barriers.
3. Behavioural factors and community ownership are critical.
4. Current settlement planning norms may perpetuate fire risks.
5. Sociocultural context shape fire risk and response.
6. Gaps in data undermine prevention and advocacy.
7. Coordination and practical guidance are needed.
8. There is a desire for more time to discuss specific case studies, lessons learnt and approaches to fire safety that have been used in different geographies.

Next Steps:

- Participants were invited to share future topic suggestions via the Kindling email: fire@kindlingsafety.org.
- A recording of the session will be shared with attendees pending speakers' consent.
- Future CoP meetings will focus on fire investigations, community engagement, and intersectional fire governance.

References:

Global Shelter Cluster, 2023. The State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelters and Settlements: A Story of Unintended Consequences. Global Shelter Cluster. Available at: <https://s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/cdn.sheltercluster.org/public/docs/GSC-State-Of-Fire-Safety-Report.pdf?VersionId=24w5.31rvwqFlaOLOpmK0zl.JvTD3xmc>.

APPENDIX A: Strategic Recommendations for the State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

Table 1: Strategic recommendations as extracted from 2023 Global Report: *The State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements: A story of unintended consequences*.

	From	To
Institutionalisation	Fire safety is often overlooked until a fire incident occurs. It is a notable gap within policy, procedures, and training/education. Where it is acknowledged, fire is treated as a technical issue requiring technical solutions, so responsibility largely falls to shelter design and site planning – this reinforces the gaps within different parts of the sector.	Fire Risk and Safety is understood to be a sociotechnical issue and is integrated within all aspects of humanitarian policies, procedures, and programming. The mainstreaming of fire is supported by an overarching goal to ensure sustained and effective shift to integrated fire prevention and safety that is supported by donor funding processes.
Embedding Sector-Wide Collaboration	Fire risk is most often perceived to be a technical problem requiring technical fixes, yet it is lived with and experienced by people in different ways. The lines of responsibility for mitigating and reducing fire risk, responding to fire, and ensuring a holistic approach to recovery are unclear and learning is seldom shared.	Mechanisms are established for interdisciplinary working, knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving and mutual learning at local, national, and global levels. These mechanisms operate across the humanitarian sector, break down siloed thinking and build capacity across the broader humanitarian and development landscape.
Education, Knowledge and Capacities	Knowledge and understanding of fire risk and safety within the sector is unevenly distributed. Information, awareness raising and training are often generic and	Capacity building and education programming that is contextually appropriate, inclusive, innovative and incorporates active learning approaches. It addresses and integrates issues relevant before, during and after a fire

	From	To
	delivered through sensitization posters / leaflets and focus on firefighting / response.	from different actors' perspectives. Evaluation is built into each program and informs future planning and delivery. A baseline of technical fire risk knowledge is expected for all.
Research	Significant gaps exist in knowledge, understanding, data and analysis in relation to the fire risk, fire consequences, and fire safety in humanitarian settings. Socio-technical perspectives are emerging, but there is an over-emphasis on technical and quantitative perspectives which can lead to unintended consequences.	Fire is established within policy, programming and academic debates around disasters, humanitarianism and across the humanitarian- development nexus. Interdisciplinary research and evaluation of programs informs future socio-technical interventions.
Fire Risk Assessments	Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) are rarely implemented within the humanitarian sector. There is no standardized FRA methodology for humanitarian settings. This results in a gap in knowledge of fire risk which filters into programming gaps and unintended consequences	A standardized methodology to assess local fire problems, capacities and capabilities for risk reduction and response, and opportunities for risk reduction programming that harnesses fire safety knowledges and technological developments. The FRA approach would embed evaluation to ensure plans and programming can respond to changes (and therefore needs) in each specific context.

	From	To
Fire Risk Reduction Programming	Fire safety is treated like a check-box exercise unless individual champions in the sector advocate for the issue to be addressed more systematically. Even then fire risk reduction programs are ad hoc.	Fire risk reduction programming is prioritized in settlements with high fire risk. Well-established data, evidence, case studies, guidance, and other resources support the development and implementation of fire risk reduction programming, along with context specific FRAs. Program evaluations feed lessons back into the collective knowledge base of the sector, enabling iterative learning.
Engagement with Non-Traditional Actors	Fire safety initiatives tend to be 'done to' rather than 'created with' the communities who are at the forefront of fire risk in humanitarian contexts.	The experiences, concerns and practices of settlement residents, host communities, local fire services, authorities and businesses are integrated into fire risk safety assessments and fire risk reduction programming through collaborative engagement.
Fire Incident Reporting	Lack of post-fire incident reporting and data collection mechanisms; no coordinated global reporting system for fires in humanitarian settings; gaps in data that demonstrate the impacts of fire and fire risk management initiatives.	Consistent use of standardized incident reporting system across the sector; systematic data collection and storage; understanding of causes and impacts of fire; established mechanism to use data to inform policy and programming.

	From	To
Safety Reporting Mechanism	Fire risk issues are often readily observable but there are no systems for reporting these observations, so they tend to go under the radar. Combined with weak systems of accountability, avoidable fire incidences occur as well as preventable injuries and fatalities.	A safety reporting mechanism can be an effective way to identify fire safety issues early before incidents occur. Such a mechanism would allow individuals living in humanitarian settlements, as well as humanitarian staff and volunteers to report concerns, hazards, or potential fire risks they observe or encounter. This promotes a sense of responsibility and empowers residents and staff to actively participate in fire safety. 'It also sends a message that safety is a priority and that reports will be taken seriously, leading to a more proactive approach to fire prevention and risk mitigation.
Standards	While existing humanitarian standards acknowledge the issue of fire and provide some basic requirements, fire safety is not sufficiently addressed. There is no standard that addresses fire safety holistically.	The complexities of fire risk, and opportunities for holistic fire prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery are acknowledged and integrated into prevailing humanitarian standards.
Integration with Disaster Risk Reduction	Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies, practices, and discourse neglect fire. This manifests within humanitarian practice by ensuring fire is treated reactively: there is little discussion of fire prevention, preparedness, or mitigation. Lack of clarity around ownership or responsibility for DRR means it requires a sector-wide approach.	Fire is well established in DRR policies, practices, and discourse. Multi-hazard approaches address fire as part of an integrated system of DRR.