

# Middle East Situation

9 March 2026



UNHCR distribution in South Lebanon, UNHCR and partner DPNA distributed core relief items to displaced families in a collective shelter. Photo © UNHCR

## Key Highlights

- [Escalating conflict](#) across South-West Asia and the Middle East continues to affect communities and humanitarian operations across the region, with over 734,700 forcibly displaced and some 70,700 Syrian and 27,400 Afghan returns. Increased cross-border movements have been observed from Lebanon into Syria, while Afghan returns from Iran continue alongside new security and economic pressures. Humanitarian access and operating conditions remain challenging in several locations.
- The regions already host [25 million forcibly displaced people and returnees](#) who face significant protection risks and humanitarian needs, alongside host communities. UNHCR operations have adjusted modalities to ensure staff safety while continuing to deliver critical activities such as border monitoring, protection services and emergency preparedness.
- Emergency stockpiles, although limited, are ready for rapid deployment. UNHCR maintains close coordination with national authorities, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners to ensure preparedness planning that can be adapted as the situation unfolds and an effective response.

## Country Updates

### Iran

- Reception areas remain open across all UNHCR locations, with limited in-person attendance due to the current security environment. Those able to approach UNHCR offices are increasingly requesting financial assistance to meet basic needs. UNHCR is also providing remote support through a [helpline](#) handling a high volume of requests and sharing information on available assistance. From 1 to 8 March, UNHCR received over 7,500 calls, reflecting growing needs and demand for information and support.
- Afghan refugees report restricted movement, heightened security presence in urban areas, sharply rising food prices and loss of livelihoods, alongside growing psychosocial distress and increased gender-based violence-related concerns. Recent approaches illustrate these pressures. In Kerman, a 21-year-old Afghan woman living with her mother and three younger brothers, sought assistance for her family after her father's death forced her to leave school and collect recyclable materials to support the household. With limited income and growing responsibilities, she struggles to meet basic needs while caring for siblings affected by anxiety and disrupted schooling. The worsening situation has further reduced her already fragile income, reflecting the increasing strain on vulnerable refugee households.

### Afghanistan-Pakistan

- Border monitoring interviews with Afghan returnees from Iran indicate that instability influenced decisions to return. Some reported being unable to collect salaries prior to departure as employers had reportedly left or were unreachable. Interviewees were particularly worried about the situation in Tehran and Esfahan, noting limited contact with relatives after 28 February and leaving most belongings behind. Some families said they were directly affected by explosions; one reported that the house they were living in collapsed after an explosion, resulting in the loss of their belongings. Returnees also reported detention prior to deportation. These accounts highlight significant protection risks for Afghan families, including women and children, and exposure to conflict-related harm.
- Spin Boldak (Afghanistan – Pakistan) and Milak (Afghanistan – Iran) crossings remain open only for returnee inflows, while the Baramcha unofficial crossing is closed. Torkham remains closed amid sporadic cross-border fire, while Chaman (Pakistan – Afghanistan) is open only for returnees. UNHCR is preparing for potential surges should Torkham (Afghanistan – Pakistan) **reopen**. Interviews with Afghan returnees and deportees indicate heightened tensions and intensified crackdowns by law enforcement in Pakistan, including increased harassment at checkpoints, extortion arrests and unlawful detention in Islamabad, Balochistan and Punjab. Advocacy with the Government of Pakistan continues at all levels.

### Turkmenistan

- No new arrivals reported to Turkmenistan. All border crossings are open only for evacuation of third country nationals.

### Iraq

- No changes have been reported in population movements at Iran–Iraq border crossings. Some restrictions persist, allowing only Iraqi nationals to enter Iraq from Iran and only Iranian nationals to enter Iran from Iraq. In the Kurdistan Region’s Sulaymaniyah crossings, Iranian nationals continue to enter under normal visa procedures.
- UNHCR, with UN partners, maintains preparedness plans for potential outflows from Iran, supporting the Government of Iraq’s lead role in any emergency response. UNHCR continues monitoring borders, engaging authorities on contingency planning, and conducting outreach to Iranian refugees. Despite the security situation, operations remain ongoing: the helpline resumed on 8 March, and registration continues in Dohuk governorate.

### Lebanon

- On 8 March, the Minister of Public Health announced that 394 people have been killed and 1,160 injured since the start of the escalation. Women and children account for a significant proportion of casualties, and the number continues to increase as attacks persist. Several Syrians are already confirmed among the dead.
- Displacement continues to rise as Israeli evacuation orders and ongoing hostilities force people from their homes, with 517,000 people registered with the Government as displaced. More than 117,200 individuals are currently sheltering in 538 collective shelters, quickly reaching full capacity.
- UNHCR has provided support to almost 62,000 affected individuals across 276 collective sites nationwide, delivering over 163,800 essential items, such as blankets, mattresses, solar lamps, and sleeping bags, in close coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Lebanese Disaster Risk Management Unit. Protection efforts focus on monitoring, psychosocial support, high-risk referrals, and emergency cash.

### Syria

- Close to 70,700 Syrians and 7,000 Lebanese crossed into Syria, according to Syrian authorities. They include Syrian refugees in Lebanon who had already decided to go home, as well as others who have fled the ongoing conflict. UNHCR maintains a presence at key border points, providing transportation assistance, blankets and water, in coordination with the authorities. Preparedness measures, including pre-positioning supplies, remain active.

### Türkiye

- UNHCR maintains active border monitoring along the Van–Ağrı-Hakkari border area, where it is the only UN agency with a permanent presence, working closely with authorities and partners to track developments and identify potential protection needs. UNHCR has deployed additional staff for real-time coordination with authorities and partners, including refugee-led organizations.
- The border crossings of Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Van) have remained generally open and operational for both entries and exits. On average, 1,300 people per day arrive in Türkiye through the three border crossings which is lower than the daily average before the war (4,500 – 5,000 people).
- For some Iranian nationals entering Türkiye under the visa-free short-term stay regime, up to 90 days, movements may reflect routine purposes, such as visits, tourism, or transit to catch a flight, or precautionary or temporary travel while individuals assess developments in Iran. Others crossing from Türkiye into Iran reported traveling to meet loved ones with whom they had difficulty communicating because of internet connectivity reasons.
- National preparedness plans and measures are being coordinated by the Ministry of Interior's Presidency of Migration Management. UNHCR is strengthening coordination with partners to support preparedness and information exchange.

## Armenia

- The Agarak border crossing between Armenia and Iran remains open and operational, with limited cross-border movement observed in both directions. UNHCR field observations indicate that movements consist primarily of small groups of travellers and families, including both Iranian nationals and foreign nationals.
- Movements remain limited and manageable, with no indications of large-scale population movements at this stage. Commercial traffic continues in both directions, and UNHCR remains in close coordination with national authorities and partners to monitor developments and maintain preparedness.

## Coordination

Given the scale and scope of potential refugee movements across the region, UNHCR has activated the Refugee Coordination Model and appointed Ayaki Ito, Director of Emergency and Programme Support, as Cross-Regional Refugee Coordinator. UNHCR will continue to lead cross-regional preparedness and response efforts, and coordinate with relevant authorities, UN agencies and humanitarian partners. Considering the evolving humanitarian situation, UNHCR has declared an internal Level 2 emergency to enable an enhanced operational response across affected countries.

## Financial Information

UNHCR operations across the affected regions remain [critically underfunded](#) at a time when humanitarian needs and operational risks are increasing.

- **In South-West Asia**, UNHCR requires USD 454 million in 2026 to support forcibly displaced populations that fall under the Afghanistan situation. As of end-February, only 15 per cent had been received. Funding shortfalls are particularly acute in Iran (8 per cent funded) and Afghanistan (17 per cent funded), where economic pressures and instability continue to drive humanitarian needs.
- **In the Middle East**, significant funding gaps persist. Lebanon is only 14 per cent funded against a requirement of USD 472 million, while Iraq is 28 per cent funded against a requirement of USD 61 million, limiting the scope for preparedness and emergency response activities. The Syria operation is also critically underfunded at 28 per cent of its USD 324 million requirement, despite continued high humanitarian needs and ongoing return dynamics.
- **In Europe**, funding levels currently stand at 42 per cent for both Türkiye (USD 210 million requirement) and Armenia (USD 9 million requirement).

Severe funding shortfalls risk creating a crisis within a crisis at a time when needs across the affected regions are rapidly increasing. Without additional resources, UNHCR's ability to scale up protection and life-saving assistance in response to further displacement or humanitarian needs may be constrained.

## Contact

For further information on the situation or UNHCR's response across affected countries, please contact the Regional Bureaux: [rbapext@unhcr.org](mailto:rbapext@unhcr.org) (Asia and the Pacific) and [menareporting@unhcr.org](mailto:menareporting@unhcr.org) (Middle East and North Africa).

For more information on UNHCR's response across affected countries, please visit [Operational Data Portal](#) and [UNHCR website](#).