

Middle East Situation

19 March 2026



Lebanon. Displaced by recent hostilities © UNHCR

Key Highlights

- Escalating conflict across South-West Asia and the Middle East continues to affect communities and humanitarian operations. The regions already host 24.3 million forcibly displaced people and returnees who face significant protection risks and humanitarian needs, alongside host communities. Families, including people already living as refugees, are fleeing their homes with nowhere safe to go and in urgent need of protection and assistance.
- UNHCR operations have adjusted modalities to safeguard staff while maintaining critical activities, including border monitoring and protection services. Emergency stockpiles are in place for rapid deployment. UNHCR is coordinating with national authorities, UN agencies, and humanitarian partners to strengthen preparedness as the situation evolves.
- For the latest information on population movements, see the [UNHCR CORE update](#) and the [newly launched dedicated Operational Data Portal](#) page on the Middle East situation.

Country Updates

Iran

- Since the start of the crisis, UNHCR Iran has assisted more than 29,600 Afghans through helplines and in-person counselling, alongside registration, legal aid and psychosocial support. Demand remains high: the nationwide helpline receives around 1,000 calls daily and is often overwhelmed with people continuing to approach UNHCR offices despite the security situation. On 17 March, nearly 100 people visited offices in Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz and Kerman, mainly seeking financial support, resettlement information and case follow-up. Afghans' accounts point to deepening hardship, including inability to access subsidised healthcare, while ongoing insecurity limits wider access to critical services.
- On 18 March, around 2,180 highly vulnerable refugee households (9,228 people) received multi-purpose cash assistance despite nationwide banking disruptions. This support enabled families to meet urgent needs with dignity amid a challenging security and economic environment.

Afghanistan-Pakistan

- In Afghanistan and Pakistan, cross-border clashes have displaced an estimated 115,000 and 3,500 people respectively. More than 312,100 Afghans have also returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2026.
- Protection monitoring at Spin Boldak (Afghanistan-Pakistan), and Zaranj and Islam Qala (Afghanistan-Iran) highlighted continued pressure on Afghans in neighbouring countries. Returnees from Pakistan reported arrests, detention, harassment and extortion, while those from Iran mentioned poor detention conditions and limited access to health care, with some also reporting family separation and loss of wages or housing deposits. Reintegration challenges remain significant, particularly in accessing employment, housing and basic services, underscoring the need for increased support to returnee-hosting areas.

Turkmenistan

- All four border crossings with Iran are open to all nationalities.

Iraq

- No significant changes in population movements have been reported at border crossings between Iran and Iraq to date. Entry conditions vary across locations: in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Iranian nationals can enter under normal visa procedures, while in central and southern governorates border crossing points remain open for travellers and commercial trade. Authorities continue to monitor movements and apply relevant national entry regulations.
- Together with other UN agencies and partners, UNHCR maintains preparedness plans for potential refugee movements from Iran, in support of the Government of Iraq who would lead any emergency response. UNHCR continues to monitor border movements, engage with

authorities on contingency planning, and maintain outreach to Iranian refugees. UNHCR operations continue, selectively and at a reduced scale, including through the helpline.

Lebanon

- Displacement continues to rise following large-scale Israeli evacuation orders and ongoing hostilities. Over 1,000,000 individuals have registered as displaced on the online governmental self-registration platform^[1]. Of the registered, around 133,400 displaced persons are staying in 633 collective sites nationwide, quickly reaching full capacity. Lebanon's Ministry of Health reports a devastating toll since the beginning of the escalation on 2 March, with 968 people killed – among them 116 children – and 2,432 others injured. Refugees are among those directly impacted by the attacks, evacuation orders and displacement.
- Under the leadership of the Minister of Social Affairs and within the existing Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) framework, UNHCR continues its contribution to the emergency response. So far, over 71,200 displaced persons were assisted across 412 collective shelters, through the distribution of close to 192,000 essential items. UNHCR and protection partners have supported over 16,300 affected individuals with critical protection services including emergency case management, psychosocial support, and recreational activities, and provided 2,127 individuals with Emergency Protection Cash Assistance grants. Community-based protection services continue to be delivered through 15 operational Community Development Centres.
- The UN [Inter-Agency Flash Appeal](#) was launched on 13 March to mobilize support for up to 1 million people affected by the escalation.

Syria

- According to Syrian authorities, over 147,800 persons have crossed the border from Lebanon into Syria including around 132,200 Syrians – with 39,840 indicating an intention to return permanently, and around 15,600 Lebanese. 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, and coordinating with authorities. Preparedness measures, including pre-positioned supplies, remain active.

Türkiye

- UNHCR continues to observe the situation along the Van–Ağrı-Hakkari border area, working closely with authorities and partners.
- The border crossings of Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Van) have remained generally open and operational for both entries and exits. The average rate of arrivals and departures are below the pre-war daily average (4,500 – 5,000 people).
- For some Iranian nationals entering Türkiye under the visa-free short-term stay regime (up to 90 days), movements reflect routine purposes such as visits, tourism, or transit to catch a flight, or precautionary or temporary travel while individuals assess developments in Iran. Most of the

individuals crossing from Türkiye into Iran reported traveling to meet loved ones with whom they had difficulty communicating due to lack of internet connectivity.

- National preparedness plans and measures are being coordinated by the Ministry of Interior's Presidency of Migration Management. UNHCR is strengthening inter-agency coordination with partners to support preparedness and information exchange.

Armenia

- Observed cross-border movement at the Agarak border between Armenia and Iran continues at limited levels. It includes primarily routine, commercial traffic and small groups of people. At this stage there are no indications of large-scale population arrivals or displacement. UNHCR continues to coordinate closely with national authorities and partners to monitor developments and maintain preparedness.
- UNHCR continues to receive and respond to inquiries from Iranian nationals approaching the office or contacting the hotline, primarily seeking information on asylum procedures and available assistance in Armenia. UNHCR is providing counselling, information on the asylum process and referrals to relevant authorities. UNHCR also shares information materials and Help Page resources and refers individuals to legal aid and social support partners.

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 (Asia and the Pacific) and menareporting@unhcr.org (Middle East and North Africa).

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