Middle East Situation
Lebanon - Flash Update #3
16 – 22 March 2026

Displaced children participate in a recreational activity at a collective shelter in Beirut. ©UNHCR

PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE

1,049,328
Displaced people registered through Lebanon's government relief platform (Source: MoSA 16 March at 17:00)

134,377
Internally displaced people hosted in collective shelters (Source: DRM as of 22 March 2026 at 17:00)

644
Operational emergency collective shelters (Source: DRM as of 22 March 2026 at 17:00)

157,921
Syrians who have crossed back to Syria between 2-22 March (Source: Syria GAPC)

22,636
Lebanese have crossed to Syria between 2-22 March (Source: Syria GAPC)

OVERVIEW

- **Escalating hostilities and civilian impact:** Intense air and artillery strikes continued across Lebanon over the past week, including in densely populated residential areas of Beirut outside the southern suburbs. One of these deadly attacks took place in a neighbourhood – Zuqaq al-Blat – where several collective shelters hosting internally displaced people are located, adding to the fear and trauma many of them are already feeling. The Ministry of Public Health reports that 1,029 people have been killed and 2,786 injured as of 22 March.
- **Political signals:** In the wake of the 18 March emergency security meeting, President Joseph Aoun's call for national unity and expanded shelter capacity, together with the 19 March visit of the French Foreign Minister endorsing President Aoun's negotiation initiative, highlighted continued diplomatic engagement, though without a breakthrough on de-escalation.
- **Mass displacement and pressure on shelters:** Displacement has been propelled by repeated evacuation orders across southern Lebanon, parts of Beirut and the Bekaa, including a new geographic evacuation warning issued to all of Tyre, covering Palestinian refugee camps and surrounding areas. While hundreds of collective shelters have been activated, most displaced people stay outside shelters, with an estimated half of the displaced refugees identified being hosted by family or friends, 31% renting temporary accommodation, and 13% staying in open or improvised spaces.
- **Cross-border movements to Syria:** Since 2 March, the Syrian authorities have reported more than 180,500 arrivals in Syria, including 157,921 Syrians and 22,636 Lebanese, with nearly 8,660 Syrians crossing on 18 March alone. However, there are also reports of increasing movements through unofficial crossing points, raising protection concerns of exploitation by smugglers.
- **Humanitarian access:** Over the past week, access for humanitarian actors has become more constrained as insecurity and targeted strikes on bridges in South Lebanon have increasingly disrupted connectivity and movement, aiming to cut supply routes and isolate areas south of the Litani River.

COORDINATION

Under the leadership of the Minister of Social Affairs and within the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) framework, UNHCR Lebanon co-leads the Inter-Sector Coordination Group with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), OCHA, and UNDP. UNHCR also co-leads the Protection Sector with MoSA and Oxfam; the Shelter/Core Relief Items Sector with MoSA and the Norwegian Refugee Council, and co-chairs the Cash Working Group (CWG) alongside MoSA and World Vision International.

In situations of internal displacement, UNHCR plays a coordination and response role within the sectors it co-leads with the Government and NGOs, while maintaining overall responsibility for the refugee response in line with its mandate.

SPOTLIGHT ON OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS

OUTREACH VOLUNTEER
متطوع وصول

As part of its commitment to localisation and community-based protection, UNHCR works with a network of 448 Outreach Volunteers (OVs) as trusted members of both refugee and hosting Lebanese communities who dedicate their time to delivering community-led solutions. As airstrikes have intensified across the country, 72 of the OVs (15%) have become displaced, yet they remain active in their communities.

An OV supports a recreational activity for displaced children at a collective shelter. ©UNHCR

Since 2 March, OVs have referred over 3,900 displaced refugees at heightened risk to relevant services. Key risks include lack of emergency shelter, accounting for 22% of referrals, mainly in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon area. OVs also identified numerous displaced refugees with serious medical conditions, facing risk of eviction, as well as women at risk.

Beyond referrals, OVs help mobilise local solidarity. In the Bekaa, one OV coordinated with the NGO Women Now to provide suhoor meals to 29 fasting displaced refugee families hosted in community shelters managed by refugee-led organisations EMA and Frontliners for Change. Other OVs have been supporting child protection teams to facilitate recreational and psychosocial activities for children in collective shelters and help mobilize community donations. These efforts highlight the important role OVs play in mobilising local solidarity and delivering responsive, community-driven assistance.

UNHCR RESPONSE

The escalation of violence is causing profound fear, anxiety, and psychological strain, especially among communities already exhausted by years of instability and repeated displacement. To meet the increasing humanitarian needs of displaced Lebanese and refugees, UNHCR and its partners are providing lifesaving protection services, shelter assistance, core relief items (CRIs), and cash support. Alongside the emergency response to internal displacement, UNHCR continues implementing its essential protection, including community-based protection, shelter, multi-purpose cash assistance and durable solutions programmes for the refugee population, which are now more critical than ever as the refugees are also impacted in multiple ways by the escalation of hostilities.

PROTECTION

As the new escalation of conflict entered its third week, the protection environment in Lebanon deteriorated sharply for both Lebanese and refugees. UNHCR's refugee protection activities are ongoing and have been adapted to include appropriate support to displaced refugees.

Challenges

- **Security and access risks remain severe:** Refugee casualties have reached 83 people, including 11 children (23 fatalities and 60 injuries), and insecurity and staff displacement have constrained in-person missions by protection partners. Key protection risks in collective shelters, including overcrowding, poor WASH conditions, lack of privacy and limited gender-segregated facilities, all heighten risks of violence against women and children and create additional challenges for older persons and persons with disabilities.
- **High demand for humanitarian support among displaced refugees:** Since the start of the escalation, 6,821 displaced refugees have contacted UNHCR or have been referred by OVs and partners to seek help with shelter, health, documentation, and other urgent needs.
- **Sustaining and expanding community-based protection:** OVs and Community Development Centres (CDCs) have been crucial to identifying high-risk cases and connecting displaced families with services, but their capacity is under pressure. Further investment is needed to reinforce CDC operations in safe areas and remote support where physical access is constrained.

Response

- **UNHCR's refugee displacement tracking tool is up and running:** 1,359 families were identified, with over 400 refugees unable to leave conflict-affected areas. 22% of those identified have a serious medical condition. Displaced refugees particularly highlight needs in terms of shelter, healthcare, protection, and food, and UNHCR and partners have consequently made 1,542 referrals to protection services, emergency protection cash assistance, and shelter support.
- **UNHCR and protection partners have reached over 16,000 persons** with protection services, including one-to-one emergency case management to address acute risks (such as GBV, child protection, and serious medical or shelter needs), as well as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), community outreach, and recreational activities for children.
- **Emergency Protection Cash Assistance (EPCA):** Since the start of the escalation, UNHCR has provided 551 EPCA grants to 2,728 vulnerable displaced refugees (98% Syrian refugees, 2% other nationalities), enabling families to pay for safe transport, temporary shelter and urgent medical costs. UNHCR also trained 16 partner staff in the Bekaa on protection cash to speed up support for high-risk cases.
- **Community Development Centres (CDCs):** During the reporting period, more than 5,000 individuals received information, participated in an awareness session, received psychosocial support, or were referred to a specialized service at a CDC. 66% of those who benefited from this service were women and girls.
- **Protection in collective shelters:** Community-based protection partners reached 222 people in nine collective shelters with recreational and psychosocial activities and awareness sessions, mostly in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, while Sports for Protection activities engaged 139 children (60% girls) in five shelters through 12 trained Syrian and Lebanese coaches.
- **Communicating with Communities and National Call Centre reach:** To support the dissemination of information, UNHCR created a dedicated Emergency page on its HELP website, in Arabic and English, to

sense of normalcy through football. ©UNHCR

provide the latest information and resources. The page has been viewed 38,446 times since its launch, demonstrating its crucial role in connecting people with timely, life-saving information. UNHCR's WhatsApp channel, with over 74,000 subscribers, also shares key messages and up-to-date information.

The National Call Centre has been handling on average 1,200 calls per day over the past three weeks, mainly on displacement, return and registration, plus over 191 online messages reporting displacement since the start of the emergency, with a spike after the Tyre evacuation order.

- **Enhanced protection and border monitoring:** A rising number of Syrians are returning to Syria following the escalation, with over 157,900 Syrians returning since 2 March, according to Syrian authorities, Findings indicate that while some Syrians had already planned to return at this time, fear and the direct impact of hostilities are now the main triggers of return, due to *force majeure* as an emergency measure. UNHCR Lebanon is coordinating closely with UNHCR Syria to help ensure that those returning receive appropriate support and assistance.

SHELTER AND CORE-RELIEF ITEMS (CRIs)

The vast majority (87%) of the 1,049,328 self-registered displaced are staying outside of collective shelters with relatives, renting temporary accommodation, or sheltering in cars or on the streets. Overcrowding is increasingly common, with multiple families sharing single apartments to reduce costs amid soaring living expenses and scarce housing options. Rising rental costs and eviction risks pose challenges for many households, and UNHCR and partners are engaging with municipalities to improve access to shelter options. Across locations, the loss of livelihoods continues to affect families' ability to meet basic needs and pay rent.

Challenges

- **Inadequate and overstretched shelter capacity:** Many collective shelters are public buildings, mainly schools (472 of the collective shelters are currently being used), that require partitioning for privacy and minor rehabilitation, including more dignified and accessible bathrooms for people with limited mobility. UNHCR and its partners are trying to keep pace with the growing requests to make the public buildings designated as collective shelters habitable and barrier-free for displaced with low mobility.
- **Limited contingency on UNHCR's stock of CRIs:** Thanks to recent contributions, including and in-kind donation from the Government of Italy of kitchen sets, blankets, hygiene kits and jerry cans and ongoing distributions, immediate CRI needs in most collective shelters are now largely covered. However, without additional stocks, UNHCR would have limited capacity to immediately respond if a large number of people would be forced to flee within a short period of time and require immediate access to shelter.
- **Limited options for non-Lebanese, including refugee displaced families:** Access to safe shelters for non-Lebanese, including refugees, remains constrained, while many highly vulnerable families – Lebanese and non-Lebanese - are renting temporary accommodation or are hosted in overcrowded accommodation or makeshift settings. For these families, cash for shelter remains critical to maintain safe housing, avoid eviction and reduce reliance on unsafe coping arrangements.

Response

- **Reaching over 72,800 people with CRIs in more than half of all operational collective shelters:** Since 2 March, UNHCR has assisted 72,827 displaced persons (16,670 families) across 431 collective shelters nationwide, distributing 195,128 CRIs, including 63,829 blankets, 65,436 mattresses, 45,844 sleeping mats, 8,234 solar lamps, 8,049 jerry cans, and 3,736 sleeping bags. These items ensure that families are not sleeping on bare floors and have basic lighting and water containers. UNHCR has also assisted 465 displaced Syrian refugees (76 families) in informal tented settlements (ITS) and individual shelters with the distribution of 470 CRIs.
- **Improving conditions of six collective shelters:** UNHCR has so far helped to improve their habitability through internal partitioning, water and sanitation improvements and weatherproofing in three collective shelters in the Bekaa, hosting 177 displaced Syrian refugees (29 families). This work improves privacy, safety and accessibility, particularly for women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. In addition,

UNHCR has provided privacy partitioning for 38 classrooms in a collective shelter in the North and in two collective shelters in Mount Lebanon, benefiting 48 displaced families.

- **Expanding shelter options for non-Lebanese:** Further to the Inter-Ministerial Committee decision to allocate shelters for non-Lebanese in each governorate, UNHCR is working with local authorities to identify and equip sites. To date, 14 collective shelters for non-Lebanese have been opened, providing urgently needed shelter for refugees and other non-Lebanese unable to access other sites.
- **Supporting hard-to-reach front-line areas:** UNHCR contributed CRIs to three humanitarian convoys to hard-to-reach areas of Rmeish (200 mattresses, 200 blankets, 200 sleeping mats), Qlaiaa (471 blankets, 157 mattresses, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and solar lamps) and Tibnin (78 blankets, 26 mattresses, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and solar lamps) in southern Lebanon, supporting families in front-line municipalities where access has been highly constrained. The inter-agency convoy to Rmeich successfully reached its destination on the second attempt despite security challenges.

UNHCR delivers core-relief items to a collective shelter in Beirut on 9 March. ©UNHCR

CASH ASSISTANCE

Multi-purpose cash assistance remains a critical lifeline for vulnerable displaced households, helping them meet urgent needs while preserving dignity, choice, and resilience. Given functioning markets and availability of goods, cash continues to be the most efficient and effective assistance modality.

Challenges

- **Significant coverage gap for refugees and other non-Lebanese:** The Government's Shock Responsive Safety Net (SRSN) enables payments to households from areas affected by evacuations. Refugees affected by the escalation are not covered by the SRSN, and many have lost their livelihoods due to displacement, insecurity and movement restrictions, making them unable to pay rents, pay for food, or see the doctor.
- **High needs outside collective shelters:** Most displaced people are staying outside collective shelters, hosted by communities or renting temporarily. They need cash to pay for housing, food, transport and medicines; without this, households are more likely to incur debt, reduce essential consumption or resort to negative coping strategies.

Response

- With the Government's activation of the SRSN currently accessible only to Lebanese households, there is a critical gap in support for refugees affected by the escalation. In close coordination with MoSA, UNHCR is prepared to complement the SRSN by delivering Emergency Multipurpose Cash Assistance (EMPCA) to vulnerable displaced refugee families. To ensure coherence across national and humanitarian systems, the EMPCA programme has been aligned with the SRSN's targeting criteria, transfer values, and duration of assistance.

UNHCR Emergency Appeal for Lebanon

USD 61 million

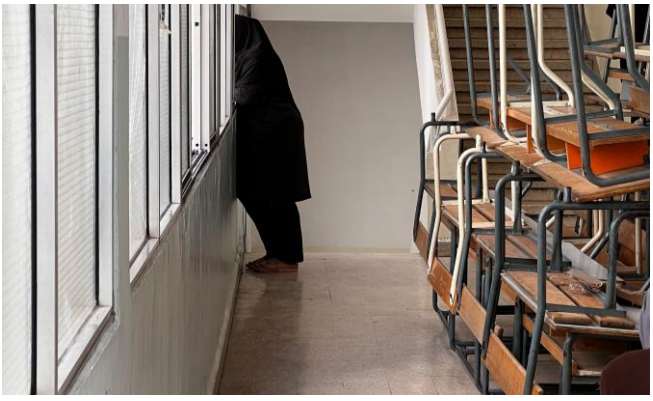
The Lebanon Flash Appeal calls for USD $308.3 million to provide lifesaving assistance and protection to one million affected people from March to May. Under this emergency Appeal, UNHCR's requires $61 million to reach 600,000 displaced people with protection, shelter and core-relief items, and cash assistance.

The Appeals support the Government-led emergency response and will enable humanitarian partners to rapidly scale up assistance across priority sectors over a three-month period.

Special thanks to the Governments of France, Italy and Sweden for their swift support to UNHCR's emergency response.

As of the end of February 2026, UNHCR remained funded at only 14% – with overall needs totalling $472.3 million. UNHCR's emergency response is therefore starting from a critically underfunded situation.

In this dynamic operational environment, flexible funding is vital for UNHCR to remain agile and ensure the response is efficient and adaptive in order to provide protection and assistance to the people who need it most.



UNHCR & PARTNERS PRESENCE

UNHCR maintains presence in Lebanon through its Country Office and three Field Offices (Beirut, Tripoli, and Zahle) with a workforce of more than 300 staff. We deliver our programmes with 13 I/NGO partners (9 national, 4 international) and in close coordination and collaboration with the Government of Lebanon.

UNHCR is grateful for the support of donors who contributed to this operation

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