

# Weekly Update

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**19 May 2026**

Middle East Situation



# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | WEEKLY UPDATE

Key Figures from the Cross-regional Response as of 19 May 2026

IRAN/Neighbouring Countries	LEBANON	SYRIA	AFGHANISTAN & PAKISTAN
<b>3.2M</b> Temporarily internally relocated according to GIRI/30 March. Increasing numbers of people are likely returning to their places of habitual residence.	<b>1.05M</b> IDPs <i>35% children · Gov. of Lebanon</i>	<b>367,291</b> Syrian returnees from Lebanon <i>91,881 intend permanent return</i>	<b>411,900</b> Afghan returns since start of crisis <i>Total number of returnees: 678,500 in 2026</i>
<b>1.65M</b> Refugees & others in need of intl. protection	<b>130,425</b> IDPs in 634 collective shelters	<b>81,291</b> Lebanese refugees in Syria	<b>163,300</b> Returns from Iran to Afghanistan · 80% deportation-driven
<b>246,300</b> <b>219,200</b> Iranians → Türkiye    Türkiye → Iran	<b>19%</b> Fewer IDPs in collective shelters since ceasefire announcement	<b>~1,000</b> Daily Lebanese arrivals on average	<b>248,600</b> Returns from Pakistan
<b>34,900</b> <b>33,700</b> Iranians → Armenia    Armenia → Iran	<b>3,270</b> Refugee families known to UNHCR remain displaced	<b>Top areas of return</b> Rural Damascus 20% · Aleppo 19% · Idlib 13%	<b>100,900</b> Newly displaced in SE Afghanistan mostly in Khost, Nangarhar and Kunar provinces
<b>11,800</b> Iranians → Pakistan (Taftan)			<b>3,500</b> Internally displaced in Pakistan

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Since late February, escalating hostilities in Iran and Lebanon have triggered humanitarian consequences with impact across the region, including refugee returns in adverse circumstances to Afghanistan and Syria. Events are unfolding against an already fragile humanitarian baseline, with over 24 million forcibly displaced people hosted across the wider region prior to the current escalation, alongside host communities under significant economic and social strain.

Inter agency emergency response is underway to address urgent needs. In Iran, the Flash Refugee Response Plan targets refugees and others in need of international protection alongside affected host communities. In Lebanon, a Flash Appeal complements the broader response under the Lebanon Response Plan to deliver life saving assistance and protection, including to Syrian refugees. In Afghanistan, the funding requirement for the returns response is outlined under the Humanitarian Needs & Response Plan.

UNHCR and partners have been working across countries neighbouring Iran to strengthen preparedness for possible large-scale refugee flows, in support of national authorities. Preparedness measures are in place, including border monitoring, reception and protection readiness, but these arrangements remain highly dependent on flexible and predictable funding in an increasingly constrained resource environment.

## INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION NEEDS


UNHCR considers that Iranian and Lebanese nationals outside their countries of origin — whether already present in or newly arriving to third countries — may have international protection needs on account of the armed hostilities in Iran and Lebanon, or other reasons. Armed hostilities in Iran, together with return pressures, may compel Afghans to return to Afghanistan or move onward; UNHCR maintains that a substantial number of Afghans will have international protection needs regardless of documentation status, in line with UNHCR's September 2025 Guidance Note. Armed hostilities in Lebanon have already compelled significant numbers of Syrians to return to Syria in adverse circumstances; among them there may be Syrians with continued international protection needs.

# IRAN

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **3.2 M**

Total number of people who had temporarily internally relocated (Gov)

 **1.65 M**

Refugees and others in need of international protection in Iran

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

According to the Government of Iran, as of 30 March, approximately 3.2 million people had temporarily relocated within the country, resulting in one of the largest internal movements in recent decades. With public order largely stable since then, increasing numbers of people are likely returning to their places of habitual residence.

Iran continues to host the largest refugee population in the sub-region, the vast majority from Afghanistan. Since the onset of the crisis, approximately 163,300 people have returned from Iran to Afghanistan, bringing total returns in 2026 close to 269,400 as of 16 May. Returns decreased by 12 per cent over the reporting week to 20,300, averaging 2,900 daily. Deportations accounted for approximately 80 per cent of returns.

During UNHCR protection and border monitoring, returnees and deportees arriving from Iran to Afghanistan cited economic hardship, unemployment, high living costs, and lack of documentation as reasons for leaving Iran. Many also reported experiencing arrests during border crossings or routine checks, as well as extortion, abuse, and poor detention conditions. In Herat, Afghanistan, monitoring also indicated continued irregular movement attempts towards Iran, with some families selling assets or borrowing money to pay smugglers.

In Sistan and Baluchestan province, the Bureau for Aliens and Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA) reported a continued increase in irregular border crossings through the Saravan border crossing, mainly involving families arriving in Iran for the first time.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

From 1 March to 16 May, the UNHCR Helpline received close to 79,400 calls, including some 8,400 calls during the reporting week (10–16 May). More than 1,470 people approached UNHCR offices across the country – a 2 per cent increase compared to the previous week. A total of 496 individuals were identified for heightened protection follow-up.

Refugees contacting the helpline continue to report protection risks and needs that remain consistent with previous weeks but are increasing in scale and severity. UNHCR's latest report, *Protection Concerns Among Afghan Refugees in Iran – Helpline and Field Insights #2: Shifting Trends since the Ceasefire*, underscores a marked shift in Afghan refugees' needs before and after the ceasefire, with concerns evolving from primarily conflict-related risks to increasingly overlapping socioeconomic, legal, and service access challenges.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE


Since the onset of the crisis, UNHCR Iran has assisted close to 126,900 Afghan refugees through helplines, in-person counselling, registration, legal aid, multipurpose cash assistance, and psychosocial support.

## HUMAN IMPACT


For 29-year-old Zahra living in Shiraz, supporting her family has become overwhelming. Living with her older parents, younger sibling, and 17-year-old brother with a serious illness, she struggled as job opportunities declined following the onset of the crisis. When doctors advised a bone marrow biopsy for her brother, she could not afford private care and faced delays in crowded public hospitals, prompting her to seek help from UNHCR. The family was already enrolled in Universal Public Health Insurance, and UNHCR helped her secure a hospital appointment for June. Following assessment, the family will soon receive financial support from UNHCR.

# LEBANON

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **+1 M**

Total number of people self-registered as displaced

 **+3,270**

Refugee families known to UNHCR remain internally displaced

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

Attacks intensified over the weekend despite the 45-day ceasefire extension announced on 15 May. On 17 May, an Israeli airstrike in southern Lebanon killed six people, including three paramedics, according to Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health. Renewed displacement orders were issued in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Governorate, while daily airstrikes and exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, particularly in South Lebanon, Nabatieh, Saida, and West Bekaa, continued to cause casualties and displacement.

Daily population displacement persists, driven by ongoing hostilities and recurring evacuation orders. Population movement remains highly non-linear, with families attempting short-term returns to their areas of origin during periods of relative calm, only to find sustainable return impossible due to continuing instability, destroyed infrastructure, and lack of essential services. These conditions continue to constrain humanitarian access and hamper aid delivery.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

Escalating insecurity in South Lebanon and Nabatieh, including the killing of humanitarian workers, is reducing access and deepening protection risks, driving further displacement. In Bekaa and Baalbek El Hermel, displacement is becoming increasingly protracted, with many people unable to leave conflict-affected areas as they do not feel safe to move. Limited financial means, lack of alternative shelter, and insufficient transportation continue to prevent families from relocating, leaving them trapped in places where they do not feel secure. In the North, rising shelter needs have led to the reopening of previously closed sites, despite the ceasefire.

Worsening living conditions and prolonged displacement are increasing psychological distress and driving tensions between communities.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNHCR continues to expand life-saving assistance across Lebanon, including protection, cash support, shelter interventions, and essential relief items for displaced Lebanese and refugees. Needs are becoming more complex, with growing demand for case management as access to basic services declines due to damaged infrastructure, limited healthcare, rising food insecurity, and increasing rental costs.

UNHCR and partners have reached more than 16,600 people with information and counselling on available services and key risks. Support to collective shelters also continues, with more than 72 sites undergoing repair and maintenance, benefiting more than 14,400 displaced people, while distributions of essential items such as mattresses and blankets have reached more than 85,500 people in shelters. Distribution of emergency multipurpose cash assistance through the Inter-Agency Cash Working Group (CWG) partners is ongoing. To date, more than 128,000 refugees have been reached through the joint UNHCR-WFP multipurpose cash assistance programme. Overall, more than 618,000 conflict-affected individuals have received emergency cash assistance through a combination of government-led mechanisms, including the Shock-Responsive Safety Net (SRSN), and established humanitarian response pathways.


Humanitarian access remains difficult, with aid reaching some hard-to-reach areas. Difficult conditions are pushing some refugee families to consider return to Syria, with more than 3,000 families approaching UNHCR and more than 8,000 individuals already assisted to return to Syria with a USD 100 grant per person. Among them, 14 per cent had already been displaced within Lebanon before returning to Syria, often viewing return as their only viable option for safety. Funding remains constrained, with the inter-agency Flash Appeal only 42 per cent funded as of 8 May, limiting the ability to sustain and expand life-saving support in response to ongoing displacement and deepening needs.

# SYRIA

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **367,291**

Syrian returnees from Lebanon

 **81,291**

Lebanese refugees crossing into Syria

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

Population movements between Lebanon and Syria through the official border crossings of Jdaidet Yabous (Rural Damascus), Joussieh (Homs), and Arida (Tartous) have remained stable and within the processing capacity of border authorities. Since 2 March, 448,582 people have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, including 367,291 Syrians – of whom 91,881 intend to return permanently, while many remain undecided – and 81,291 Lebanese. Movements from Syria to Lebanon have continued at normal levels, primarily for work and commercial activities, education, medical appointments, and embassy or consular visits. Lower numbers at Arida are due to bridge repairs, with the crossing currently limited to pedestrians, while border operations remain functional.



Shimaa and Reem's mother stands with her grandchildren inside her damaged home in Dar'a, Syria where the family now lives after fleeing Lebanon, following years of displacement there.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

UNHCR and its partner Child Care Society (CCS) visited the newly opened Jisr Qamar crossing in Homs to introduce services, coordinate with authorities, and discuss support for returnees and vulnerable groups. Key needs identified include medical support, drinking water, and transportation assistance. Daily monitoring continued at Joussieh, tracking return movements, conducting follow-up visits, and supporting border authorities with data collection.

At Jdaidet Yabous, UNHCR monitoring found that most people were crossing into Syria for short family or personal visits before returning to Lebanon. Movements primarily involved families and workers commuting between the two countries, with main destinations including Rural Damascus, Damascus, and Dar'a.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

Inside Syria, interactions with returnees from Lebanon point to continuing needs across shelter, food, livelihoods, healthcare, and civil documentation. In response, UNHCR and partners continue to support arrivals through transportation assistance to areas of return, provision of essential relief items, information and referral services, and legal support. Emergency medical assistance also remains available through mobile health services at border points. During the reporting period, 320 returnees received transportation assistance and partners distributed essential relief items to newly arriving families. Support for legal counselling and referrals remains available, while assistance demands continue to shift towards areas of return, where needs are growing faster than available resources.

## HUMAN IMPACT


After nearly 14 years in displacement in southern Lebanon, two Syrian sisters, Shimaa and Reem, fled escalating violence with their children, seeking safety along Beirut's coast. Urged by their mother in Dar'a, they returned home, only to find Shimaa's home partially damaged and Reem's destroyed. Both now live with their mother in overcrowded conditions, struggling to meet their children's basic needs.

A recent visit by a UNHCR team helped identify the family's needs and refer them to available services, including support through community centres. These efforts aim to support families like theirs in the early stages of reintegration.

"I hope to repair part of my damaged home so that my daughters and grandchildren can begin to rebuild their lives in dignity and safety," said their mother.

# AFGHANISTAN & PAKISTAN

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **411,900**

Total number of Afghan returnees since start of crisis

 **162,300**

Afghan returnees from Iran since start of crisis

 **248,600**

Afghan returnees from Pakistan since start of crisis

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

Since the onset of the crisis, approximately 411,900 people have returned from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan, bringing total returns in 2026 to more than 678,500 as of 16 May. During 10–16 May, returns averaged 8,500 per day, representing a 2 per cent increase compared to the previous week (2–9 May). Returnees from Pakistan accounted for 66 per cent of arrivals, with deportations accounting for 3 per cent.

At the Torkham border crossing (Afghanistan/Pakistan border), high arrivals, truck-processing delays, overcrowding, and rising temperatures have highlighted the need to strengthen electricity supply, cooling systems, shaded waiting areas, accessibility, and screening capacity at the Omari administrative complex and Torkham Zero Point.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, limited truck movement into Afghanistan and prolonged delays continue to disrupt returns at Torkham. Many families cross ahead of their belongings, waiting several days or more than a week for their luggage, increasing hardship. UNHCR and the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees have engaged with authorities to ease bottlenecks. A high-level meeting in Peshawar on 14 May brought together key agencies to improve coordination and expedite procedures. Measures introduced aim to facilitate up to 500 trucks daily. Although the target has not yet been met, movements have increased from around 150 to 270–290 trucks per day, reducing waiting times and easing constraints for returnees.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

Border monitoring continued to indicate that many returns to Afghanistan from Pakistan are driven by pressure rather than free and informed choice. At the Pakistan border, returnees and deportees reported raids, arrests, confiscation of documents and belongings, family separation, extortion, poor detention conditions, rising transport costs, and delays in moving luggage across the border.

Monitoring at Torkham and Spin Boldak continued to document cases of unaccompanied and separated children, including minors deported after detention or returning with relatives while parents remained in Pakistan.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 869 individuals sought support at UNHCR's reception centre, raising concerns about documentation, education, deportations, and legal assistance, while authorities continued encouraging returns and expanding processing centres near Refugee Villages in four cities. UNHCR provided counselling, information, and referrals.

In Islamabad and Punjab, Pakistan, arrests increased, with many individuals detained or transferred for deportation. Across urban areas, Afghan nationals faced growing protection risks, including housing insecurity, fear of arrest, and limited access to services, particularly among undocumented and vulnerable groups. In Balochistan, arrests declined over the reporting week despite ongoing enforcement; no major new border developments were reported.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

In Afghanistan, UNHCR assisted 13,258 individuals (2,726 households) with cash-based interventions; 39 per cent of assisted households were female-headed. Partners distributed at least 20,060 hot meals across Torkham/Omari Reception Centre, Spin Boldak, Zaranj, and Bharām Chāh. Across border reception points, UNHCR partners continued providing protection screening, referrals, and assistance.

Coordination efforts in Afghanistan addressed border reception capacity, service continuity, and emerging gaps, including power support needs at Omari due to overcrowding and heat, WASH improvements and transition planning in Zaranj, adjustments to assistance levels, and infrastructure and protection concerns at Takhtapul, particularly for female health services and engagement with de facto authorities.

## HUMAN IMPACT

A family of ten returned to Afghanistan after more than 40 years in Pakistan, following sustained pressure, extortion and eviction notices. During the journey, the pregnant mother developed severe complications after a vehicle accident. Upon arrival, UNHCR partner WADAN facilitated emergency medical care, enabling a safe delivery, and provided immediate assistance including cash, food and referrals for livelihood and reintegration support in their area of return.

# TÜRKIYE

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **246,000**

Iranian nationals → Türkiye

 **219,400**

Iranian nationals → Iran

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

Cross-border movements have returned to pre-conflict levels, including daily crossings by traders for commercial purposes. The Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Hakkari) border crossings remain generally operational. Since late February to 14 May, more than 246,000 Iranian nationals entered Türkiye via these crossings, while approximately 219,000 departed to Iran, with entries continuing predominantly under the visa exemption regime, a mixed civilian composition, and no mass irregular movement observed.

Movements largely reflect routine mobility, family travel, and precautionary movement, with predominantly families or groups alongside individuals travelling alone. The most frequently cited reasons for crossing are routine travel, business, and visiting relatives, though a substantial proportion within the routine travel category indicated their decision was influenced by recent developments in Iran. Some of those crossing may have international protection needs. The overall security situation remains stable, with no changes in movement patterns anticipated.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

UNHCR continues to monitor the situation along the border in close coordination with authorities and partners. Inter-agency coordination meetings are held regularly with civil society actors active in Van. In addition to border monitoring, UNHCR and a partner NGO have conducted interviews with muhtars (local community leaders), who reported that border crossings and neighbourhood-level mobility have remained relatively stable. Authorities confirmed that no irregularities have been observed at border crossings.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

National preparedness plans are being coordinated by the Ministry of Interior's Presidency of Migration Management. UNHCR is reinforcing coordination with United Nations agencies and partners in both Ankara and the border regions to enhance preparedness and strengthen information management. Response capacities are being mapped and data coordination consolidated in preparation for potential contingency plan activation, should authorities request support in the event of large-scale movements.

# ARMENIA

## MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | COUNTRY ANALYSIS

 **34,900**

Iranian nationals entered Armenia

 **33,700**

Iranian nationals exited through Agarak

### ANALYSIS & TRENDS

Cross-border movements at the Agarak border crossing remained active and broadly balanced during 10–16 May, with approximately 6,093 crossings recorded – 3,102 entries (51 per cent) and 2,991 exits (49 per cent). UNHCR and partner observations, capturing approximately 5 per cent of total flows, confirmed movements as predominantly truck-driven (58 per cent) and pedestrian (31 per cent), primarily linked to commercial activity, short-term travel, and precautionary movement, with no increase in families or vulnerable groups.

Movements continue to be heterogeneous and primarily non-displacement-driven, with pendular or circular patterns dominant and no evidence of large-scale conflict-related displacement or sustained one-way movement into Armenia. Patterns remain consistent with previous reporting periods. The situation is expected to remain broadly stable over the coming one to two weeks, with no triggers anticipated for large-scale response activation.

### PROTECTION MONITORING

During the reporting period, 23 individuals – 78 per cent male and 22 per cent female – approached UNHCR, approximately 91 per cent of whom arrived through Agarak. Approaches were predominantly individual and adult-based, with no notable increase in families or vulnerable profiles. Primary needs comprised asylum procedure information (91 per cent), accommodation (57 per cent), and financial assistance (48 per cent), with intentions split between considering asylum (35 per cent), temporary stay (35 per cent), and undecided or assessing onward options.

Since 28 February, cumulative approaches total 350 individuals, with primary needs centred on asylum information (83 per cent), accommodation (32 per cent), and financial assistance (32 per cent), reflecting mixed and precautionary mobility rather than large-scale displacement dynamics. Monitoring relies on partial observation windows and demand-driven protection engagement; analysis remains indicative and is triangulated with administrative data and partner inputs.

### PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

No significant change in overall inter-agency response posture during the reporting period. UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, WFP, and WHO continued inter-agency coordination focused on strengthening national preparedness and asylum capacity. Activities included support to the Migration and Citizenship Service on registration preparedness near the border, interpretation, legal counselling, and contingency reception planning. Inter-agency efforts also continued on enhanced border protection monitoring, Farsi-language information materials, harmonised referral pathways for gender-based violence, child protection, and mental health and psychosocial support, and protection case management for vulnerable individuals. Preparedness activities maintain a proportionate footprint under Government leadership, with scalable response planning continuing should conditions change.

# Financial & Partner Information

MIDDLE EAST SITUATION | FUNDING, PARTNERS & CONTACTS

## Funding Status

### INTER-AGENCY APPEALS

#### IRAN FLASH REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN

# USD 80M

2.8M people in need  
Launched 26 Mar 2026  
1.65M refugees + 1M host community in need  
9 partners  
UNHCR: USD 36.2M

#### LEBANON FLASH APPEAL (in line with the LRP)

# USD 308.3M

1M people  
Issued 13 Mar 2026 · 3-month window  
Vulnerable Lebanese · Syrian Refugees · Palestine Refugees in Lebanon · Palestinian Refugees from Syria · Migrants

### UNHCR BY OPERATION · AS OF END- April 2026

Operation	Req.	Funded	%
Afghanistan	USD 216M	<div><div style="width: 25%;"></div></div>	25%
Pakistan	USD 94M	<div><div style="width: 27%;"></div></div>	27%
Iran	USD 140M	<div><div style="width: 15%;"></div></div>	15%
Lebanon	USD 472M	<div><div style="width: 19%;"></div></div>	19%
Iraq	USD 61M	<div><div style="width: 40%;"></div></div>	40%
Türkiye	USD 210M	<div><div style="width: 45%;"></div></div>	45%
Armenia	USD 9M	<div><div style="width: 58%;"></div></div>	58%
Turkmenistan		Upon Request	

UNHCR's budget for Turkmenistan falls under the UNHCR Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Kazakhstan, which also covers the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. UNHCR MCO Kazakhstan operation budget is \$7.9 million, currently 31% funded.

### CRITICAL FUNDING GAP

Severe funding shortfalls risk creating a 'crisis within a crisis' at a time when humanitarian needs and operational risks are rapidly increasing. Without additional resources, UNHCR's ability to scale up preparedness, protection and response will be critically constrained.

### INTER-AGENCY PARTNERS · IRAN FLASH RRP



### INTER-AGENCY PARTNERS IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Partners directly involved in preparedness efforts include AASW, ACH, ARCS, ASAM, FAO, Harikar, InterSOS, IOM, IRC, JCCC, KRISO, MH, Mission Armenia NGO, NRC, PC-MOI, PiN, RSPN, SCI, SOROUH, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, WFP, WHO; coordinated with UN OCHA and DCO.

### CONTACT

Asia and the Pacific (RBAP)  
[rbapext@unhcr.org](mailto:rbapext@unhcr.org)

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)  
[menareporting@unhcr.org](mailto:menareporting@unhcr.org)

For more information, visit the Operational Data Portal ([data.unhcr.org](https://data.unhcr.org)) and [unhcr.org](https://unhcr.org).