

Middle East Situation

12 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](#).

Country Updates

Iran

- According to the Government of Iran, between 600,000 and 1 million Iranian households are now [estimated](#) to temporarily have left their homes to seek safety across the country. Using the average 3.2 family size provided by the most recent national census this amounts to 1.9 to 3.2 million

individuals. Most of them are reportedly fleeing from Tehran and other major urban areas towards the north of the country and rural areas to seek safety. This figure is likely to continue rising as hostilities persist, marking a worrying escalation in humanitarian needs. So far in 2026, more than 122,000 Afghans have returned from Iran.

- People continued to approach UNHCR offices in Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz and Kerman, mainly requesting cash assistance, resettlement information, and case follow-up, while since the start of the crisis the UNHCR helpline continue to receive over 1,000 calls per day, reflecting high demand for support. Accounts shared with UNHCR illustrated how repeated crises are deepening vulnerability, including that of a young Afghan woman who had begun rebuilding her life in Bushehr before recent attacks forced her to relocate to Shiraz after losing her job and housing. These interactions highlight persistent hardship and continued reliance on UNHCR protection and assistance.

Afghanistan-Pakistan

- Humanitarian partners are advancing coordinated needs analysis in conflict-affected areas of eastern Afghanistan to inform a joint response. A broader inter-agency assessment led by IOM in coordination with OCHA is being planned, with UNHCR supporting protection components, while an initial review is underway in Kunar through a local partner. The analysis will help identify emerging needs and support preparedness amid evolving displacement and return dynamics linked to regional tensions.
- During a [joint visit](#) to the Islam Qala border crossing, UNHCR and UNICEF Representatives in Afghanistan highlighted mounting humanitarian needs among families returning from Iran and warned that escalating regional tensions could drive further returns under difficult conditions. Many arrivals, particularly children, are crossing the border exhausted and uncertain about what awaits them. Around 2.9 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan in 2025, approximately 1.86 million from Iran and over 1 million from Pakistan. More than 294,000 Afghans have already returned this year, often under adverse circumstances, placing additional pressure on fragile communities and humanitarian services. UNHCR and partners continue to support returnees at border crossings and in areas of return, but response capacities are increasingly constrained by funding shortfalls.
- Returns from Pakistan have stabilised in recent weeks amid the continued closure of the Torkham crossing although movements could increase sharply once the border reopens. Protection monitoring at Spin Boldak, Zaranj and Islam Qala border crossings pointed to growing pressure on Afghans in neighbouring countries. Interviews with more than 220 returnees on 10 March described arrests, detention, harassment and extortion in parts of Pakistan as well as deteriorating living conditions and heightened insecurity in Iran. Many also reported serious reintegration challenges in Afghanistan, particularly in accessing employment, housing and basic services, underscoring the need for protection safeguards, dignified and voluntary return processes, and sustained international support to assist returnees and host communities. 115,000 Afghans and 3,100 Pakistanis continue to remain internally displaced as result of the cross-border conflict.

Turkmenistan

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

Iraq

- No changes in population movements have been reported at border crossings between Iran and Iraq to date. Restrictions remain in place with only Iraqi nationals permitted to cross from Iran into Iraq and only Iranian nationals permitted to cross from Iraq into Iran. In the Kurdistan Region, Iranian nationals can enter under normal visa procedures.
- Together with other UN agencies and partners, UNHCR maintains preparedness plans for potential population outflows 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 despite the security situation, including through the helpline.

Lebanon

- Displacement continues to rise at a high pace following large-scale Israeli evacuation orders and airstrikes. As of 11 March, over 815,000 individuals had registered as displaced within Lebanon on the online government platform, of whom more than 125,000 are sheltering in 590 collective sites nationwide, quickly reaching full capacity. Refugees are among those directly impacted by attacks, evacuation orders and displacement.
- Under the leadership of the Minister of Social Affairs and within the existing Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) framework, UNHCR initiated its emergency response. So far, over 66,300 displaced people have been assisted across 307 collective shelters, with the distribution of nearly 180,000 essential items. Protection partners have supported over 4,000 individuals facing critical protection needs. Refugee Outreach Volunteers have referred 1,863 refugees at heightened risk to adapted services, and 166 internally displaced refugee families have received Emergency Protection Cash Assistance.
- A UN Inter-Agency Flash Appeal is being launched on 13 March to mobilize support for over 1.3 million people affected by the escalation.

Syria

- At least 89,290 Syrians and over 9,300 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, and coordinating with authorities. Preparedness measures, including pre-positioned supplies, remain active.

Türkiye

- UNHCR continues to monitor the situation along the Van–Ağrı-Hakkari border area, working closely with authorities and partners.

- The Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Van) border crossings remain generally open and operational for both entry and exit. Daily arrivals into Türkiye through these three crossings average 1,300–1,500 people, which is significantly lower than the pre-war daily average of 4,500–5,000. Border movements continue to show moderate day-to-day fluctuations, with a slight increase toward the end of the reporting period.
- Some Iranian nationals entering Türkiye under the 90-day visa-free regime may be traveling for routine purposes, such as visits, tourism, or transit, or as a precaution while monitoring developments in Iran. Many individuals crossing back into Iran reported returning to reconnect with family affected by internet disruptions.
- 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 cross-border movement in both directions. Movements remain limited and manageable, with no indication of large-scale population movements toward Armenia at this stage. UNHCR's observations indicate that those arriving are primarily small groups of travelers and families, typically traveling onward to Meghri or Yerevan.
- UNHCR continues to monitor developments in coordination with national authorities and partners and maintains a preparedness posture.

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