

Middle East Situation

6 March 2026



People gather at the Masnaa border point in Lebanon as they wait to cross into Syria © 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 316,200 forcibly displaced and some 43,000 Syrian and 22,500 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.

Operational Context

Intensifying conflict and insecurity across parts of South-West Asia and the Middle East are placing additional strain in regions already hosting some of the world's largest forcibly displaced populations. Recent developments are increasing protection risks, disrupting humanitarian access and straining already over-burdened host communities and public services. Significant population movements are already happening in several countries, including cross-border movements and localized displacement.

UNHCR and partners continue to monitor developments closely and maintain operational presence in key locations, including in border areas and reception points, to support protection monitoring, emergency aid and coordination. Preparedness measures are being advanced across affected countries in coordination with relevant national authorities and humanitarian partners. Emergency assistance systems are also in place to support a rapid scale-up as and where required.

UNHCR has declared an internal Level 2 emergency to support an enhanced immediate operational response across affected countries. However, humanitarian capacities are already stretched, and funding shortfalls may limit the ability to scale up and respond to significant emerging needs.

Country Updates

Iran

- Reception areas remain open across all UNHCR facilities, with limited in-person attendance for those approaching offices due to the current security environment. All previously scheduled interviews have been postponed until further notice.
- Among those able to approach UNHCR offices, many raised concerns about the loss of livelihoods linked to the current situation and sought financial assistance to meet basic needs. Protection teams also observed increased requests for psychosocial support related to stress, anxiety and depression, as well as concerns about the high cost of medicines and medical treatment. UNHCR continues to provide psychosocial and legal counselling, including follow-up support to previously identified gender-based violence cases.

Afghanistan-Pakistan

- Large-scale returns continue to strain communities already under pressure. Since the start of 2025, around 2.9 million Afghans have returned, mainly from Iran (1.8 million) and Pakistan (1 million). In 2026, alone, over 300,000 Afghans returned, including 126,800 from Iran (89 per cent deported) and 173,200 from Pakistan (including 13 per cent deported) as of end-February. Many arrive with limited resources to communities already under strain, creating reintegration challenges and increasing risks of further displacement.

- Returns to Afghanistan remain below levels observed prior to the recent escalation. Returns from Iran fell from around 5,200 per day in the five days before the strikes to about 3,600 per day in the following five days. Returns from Pakistan dropped more sharply, from around 3,000 per day to fewer than 600 per day, largely due to border closures. Returnees from Iran report fewer arrests of Afghans but increasingly restricted movement, limiting access to employment, services and basic goods amid rising food prices.
- Displacement inside Afghanistan is increasing. Prior to the recent escalation, Afghanistan hosted an estimated 3.2 million conflict-induced internally displaced people. Since tensions intensified, around 115,000 people have been newly displaced in Afghanistan (source: OCHA), alongside approximately 2,600 people displaced in Pakistan (source: Government of Pakistan), of whom 63 per cent are children. Numbers are likely to rise if hostilities persist.
- Cross-border hostilities between Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to disrupt border areas and humanitarian operations. Strikes have affected the Omari transit centre near Torkham and the Takhtapul reception centre near Spin Boldak. Spin Boldak and Milak crossings remain open for returnees only, while other movements are restricted. The Baramcha crossing in Helmand remains closed. With Torkham currently closed, Afghans arrested in Pakistan are being held in temporary sites pending return, raising the risk of a surge in returns should the crossing reopen.
- Afghan returns and deportations continue through southern and western border crossings, including Spin Boldak and Milak. Border interviews with returnees indicate that many deportees were arrested days before return, including at border crossings, workplaces and markets. Interviewees also report that the situation in Iran has shifted law enforcement priorities and restricted movement in several areas. Monitoring suggests fewer Afghans are attempting irregular crossings into Iran, contributing to a decline in the number held in detention facilities.
- UNHCR continues to monitor the situation and provide protection services on both sides of the border. Assistance includes counselling through [UNHCR helplines](#) in Afghanistan and Pakistan and legal assistance for refugees in Pakistan who are arrested or detained. However, operational capacity to assist returnees has declined amid significant funding shortfalls.

Turkmenistan

- No new arrivals reported to Turkmenistan where all border crossings are now open but 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 are 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.

Lebanon

- Displacement continues to rise following large-scale Israeli evacuation orders and ongoing hostilities. More than 102,000 people are currently sheltering in over 480 collective sites, with nearly 431 at full capacity.

Syria

- At least 43,500 Syrians and nearly 4,000 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, and coordinating with authorities. Preparedness measures, including pre-positioned supplies, remain active.

Türkiye

- Observed border movements remain below normal levels, with no unusual outward flows reported. On 5 March, reports indicated that 2,200 people of various nationalities entered Türkiye from Iran, while over 2,400 moved the other direction, the majority Iranian nationals returning to Iran. Combined daily entries typically range from 4,500 to 5,500 people.
- National preparedness plans and measures are being coordinated by the Ministry of Interior's Presidency of Migration Management. UNHCR continues to strengthen coordination with partners to support preparedness and information management.

Armenia

- Border crossings continue with limited movement.
- UNHCR remains in close coordination with national authorities and UN agencies. In consultation with relevant Government counterparts, regular exchanges are taking place to review baseline preparedness arrangements.

Coordination

UNHCR continues to lead on cross-regional preparedness and response coordination for any potential cross-border refugee movements, in coordination with national authorities, UN agencies and humanitarian partners. Regional Bureaux for Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa, and Europe are working closely with country operations to monitor developments, strengthen preparedness efforts and support a coordinated response.

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](#).