



Middle East Emergency One-Month Impact Report

MARCH 2026

KEY FIGURES



>42,000 Afghan refugees assisted in Iran through helplines, financial assistance and psychosocial support.



3,500 helpline calls in Iran responded to, providing critical information on support and legal assistance.



>73,000 people supported in 442 collective shelters across Lebanon.



>198,000 emergency relief items distributed in Lebanon including blankets, mattresses and solar lamps.



>3,600 people supported in Lebanon with Emergency Protection Cash Assistance to help cover urgent needs.



>47,000 people reached in Lebanon with protection services, like psychosocial support and targeted help.

Humanitarian context

One month after the latest military escalation in the Middle East, which began on 28 February, intensifying hostilities have sharply worsened the humanitarian situation with no signs of de-escalation. Sustained strikes, retaliatory attacks, and the widening scope of the conflict have deepened regional instability, driving civilian casualties, damaging critical infrastructure, and increasing displacement.

This escalation is unfolding in a region already hosting over 24 million forcibly displaced people and returnees. Many were already facing severe economic insecurity, heightened protection risks, and significant unmet needs. Host communities, who already are struggling, must absorb new displacement amid limited resources, overstretched services, and constrained funding.

The rapid deterioration is driving [internal displacement](#), and raising concerns about potential refugee outflows. In Iran, government sources estimate that 600,000 to 1 million households—up to 3.2 million people—have temporarily left their homes. In Lebanon, more than 1 million people are now internally displaced.

While cross-border movements remain relatively limited and irregular, the risk of larger scale outflows persists as insecurity deepens and access to services and livelihoods declines. Since the start of the crisis, over 60,600 Iranians and 28,600 Lebanese have crossed into neighbouring countries. Additionally, more than 179,000 Syrians from Lebanon and 38,500 Afghans from Iran have returned to their countries of origin—Syrian returns being largely family driven or prompted by worsening living conditions.

UNHCR's response

Since the onset of the conflict, UNHCR has mobilized across the region to support people forced to flee. With more than 40 offices in affected and at-risk countries, the agency maintains one of the UN's largest operational footprints, enabling a rapid, coordinated response. Pre-positioned emergency stockpiles at regional and country levels—including in Termez, Uzbekistan, near Iran—have supported the swift dispatch of family tents, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, buckets, jerry cans, and solar lamps.

On 4 March, UNHCR declared an internal Level 2 emergency to scale up its response inside Iran and reinforce preparedness in neighbouring countries. As the situation worsened, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Barham Salih, appointed Ayaki Ito, Director of UNHCR's Division of Emergency and Programme Support, as Cross Regional Refugee Coordinator (CRRC) to ensure a coherent, protection-centred inter-agency regional response. Utilizing structures under the

Refugee Coordination Model, the CRRC is now supported by a technical coordination hub at UNHCR's Regional Bureau in Amman to enhance coordination, bolster emergency support, and streamline reporting.

Inside Iran, UNHCR adapted its operational modalities to safeguard staff while maintaining essential activities, including counselling, registration, legal aid, and psychosocial support for Afghan refugees. Simultaneously, life-saving assistance, protection interventions, and financial support for refugees and host communities are being scaled up.

Across neighbouring countries, preparedness measures are being reinforced to ensure a rapid and effective response in the event of increased refugee movements. Updated contingency plans with authorities and inter-agency partners allow for a swift scale-up of protection services and life-saving assistance if required.

Iran

As one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the region, Iran is home to over 1.65 million refugees and others in need of international protection. Since 28 February, government sources indicate an estimated 600,000 to 1 million households have temporarily left their homes in search of safety. Most movements are from Tehran and other major urban centres toward northern and rural areas, indicating that displacement remains primarily internal though at a significant scale. This large-scale movement is placing increasing strain on humanitarian capacities and host communities alike and is heightening protection risks.

Across its offices in Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, and Kerman, UNHCR continues to support refugee and host community access to essential health, education, and social protection services. Reception centres and helplines remain operational, ensuring continued access to counselling, information, and assistance. In the first month of the response, UNHCR assisted more than 42,000 Afghan refugees through helplines, in-person counselling, registration, legal aid, multi-purpose financial assistance, and psychosocial support. Despite nationwide banking disruptions, 2,180 highly vulnerable refugee households—9,228 people—received multi-purpose financial assistance on 18 March to meet

urgent needs, with more financial aid planned in the coming weeks.

Demand remains extremely high: over 3,500 calls were received in March alone, overstressing helpline capacity. Despite the volatile situation, refugees continue approaching UNHCR offices, which operate at limited capacity depending on security conditions. Afghan families report severe hardship as their sources of income have dried up

Afghanistan

Since the start of the crisis, more than 40,400 Afghans have returned from Iran, though return levels remain below typical trends. In 2026 alone, more than 322,800 Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan. UNHCR has maintained a presence at key border points—including Milak-Zaranj, whenever security conditions permit—interviewing returnees to assess protection needs and referring them onwards to UNHCR-run centres, where families can access financial assistance, protection counselling, and psychosocial support.

Interviews with Afghan returnees conducted as part of UNHCR's border monitoring exercises show that Afghans continue to experience significant

Armenia

Cross-border movements at the Agarak crossing between Armenia and Iran have remained limited, with no indication of large-scale arrivals or displacement. From the outset, UNHCR has worked closely with national authorities and partners to monitor developments and review preparedness measures, including border entry procedures, reception, registration, transportation, accommodation, and assistance.

UNHCR continues to receive inquiries from Iranian nationals—both in-person and via the hotline—primarily regarding asylum procedures and available support in Armenia, providing

and they flee strikes. Some who had not previously sought help are now requesting support for shelter, basic needs, and health care.

With partner resources severely stretched, an [Inter-agency Flash Refugee Response Plan](#) was launched on 26 March, seeking \$80 million to provide protection and life-saving assistance to 2.8 million people in Iran for March-May 2026. UNHCR's requirements total \$36.23 million.

protection risks in Iran, including arrest, detention, harassment, extortion, and confiscation of personal belongings. The deepening economic crisis is further limiting access to essential services such as food, water, and healthcare. Some returnees have also reported poor detention conditions, separation from family members, and the loss of wages or housing deposits.

Upon arrival in Afghanistan, many face additional challenges in securing employment, housing, and basic services, amid ongoing tensions with Pakistan that are further worsening conditions on the ground across the country.

counselling, guidance, and referrals to relevant authorities. Information materials, Help Page resources, and links to legal aid and social support partners are being shared to ensure individuals receive timely, accurate, and accessible assistance.

Iraq

No large-scale population movements have been observed between Iran and Iraq over the past month, while efforts continue to finalize contingency planning with authorities and partners for a potential influx from Iran, in support of the Government of Iraq. Since the onset of the crisis, the UNHCR Helpline has remained fully operational, receiving calls from refugees and

asylum-seekers. The registration centre in Dohuk remains open, while centres in Baghdad, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah have opened intermittently due to insecurity. UNHCR teams have also been in contact with Iranian asylum-seekers and refugees in the Kurdistan Region to gather feedback on their needs and concerns.

Lebanon

Since 2 March, increased Israeli strikes and widespread evacuation orders have forced over 1 million people—one in five residents—to flee their homes in Lebanon. Displacement now spans the south, the Bekaa, Beirut, and the north, with numbers still rising. Many Lebanese families displaced in late 2024 have been uprooted again. More than 136,000 displaced people are sheltering in 660 collective centres, most operating far beyond capacity.

UNHCR immediately responded in coordination with the Government and partners, providing emergency relief items, shelter support, and protection information and counselling. In the first month of the response, UNHCR supported 73,870 displaced individuals in 442 collective shelters, distributing more than 198,000 essential relief items, in addition to helping with shelter upgrades and repairs, water and sanitation, and safety improvements in overcrowded sites.

Furthermore, UNHCR provided Emergency Protection Cash Assistance to over 3,600 individuals to help meet urgent needs, alongside case management, referrals, and psychosocial

support. In the first month of the response, more than 47,750 people were reached with protection services, including psychosocial support, recreational activities, counselling, and targeted assistance for high-risk individuals. This includes over 24,250 people reached through information sessions, 15,810 individuals provided with psychosocial support in collective sites, and nearly 6,900 women and girls who received dignity kits.

Despite the scale-up, significant gaps remain. Limited shelter, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and shared classrooms spaces are increasing vulnerabilities and protection risks—including exposure to exploitation and gender-based violence. Older people and persons with disabilities are particularly affected, and stress and trauma are intensifying in cramped, substandard conditions.

In line with the [inter-agency Lebanon Flash Appeal March-May 2026](#), [UNHCR is seeking US\\$61 million](#) to provide life-saving protection and support for 600,000 people affected by this emergency.



From quiet retirement to displacement

Fadi Merhi, 58 years old, was born in Lebanon and left for Germany in 1987 during the civil war. In 2025, after 38 years in Stuttgart, he decided to return to Lebanon to enjoy his retirement in Tebnine.

But last June, just three weeks after his arrival in the country, he was injured in an Israeli drone attack which cost him his leg.

“I recently came to Beirut for a hospital visit and I was staying at my daughter’s house in Dahye when Israeli attacks in Lebanon began on 2 March. Bombings in Dahye intensified and I understood I had no other option but to leave. One man carried me for hours until we reached Tayuneh

neighborhood where I spent the night sleeping on the street.

“The next day I took taxi and tried to find a shelter to stay. I went to all schools, hospitals, maybe looked at 15-16 places and finally found a place in this school where I stay now.”

The Bir Hassan school now hosts over 2,500 displaced people. Despite the hardships he has endured, Fadi is thinking of how he can help others.

“Many people here feel overwhelmed. If I can make someone smile, even for a moment, it helps all of us.”

Syria

Since the onset of the crisis, over 200,000 people have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, including approximately 179,000 Syrians—of whom more than 51,350 intend to return permanently—and more than 28,600 Lebanese temporarily seeking safety. Returns include Syrian refugees who had already planned to return as well as those compelled to leave due to the hostilities.

In coordination with authorities and partners, UNHCR has maintained a presence at key border points, providing assistance and information to new arrivals, transportation support for returnees, and essential items such as blankets and water.

UNHCR supported operations at the three official border crossings by providing legal assistance to over 468 families, supplying water to 30,000 people, delivering relief items to more

than 600 vulnerable individuals, and arranging transportation for over 3,550 people to reach their destinations. Infrastructure improvements were also undertaken, including the installation of solar streetlights.

Humanitarian partners complemented the response with food, water, health care, dignity kits, and support for children.

UNHCR Community Centres have identified and supported more than 20,000 returnees across eight governorates, carrying out needs assessments, registering families for assistance, offering psychological first aid and mental health support, referring vulnerable individuals to specialized services, and extending outreach into host communities through trained volunteers.

Türkiye

Since the start of the crisis, over 60,600 Iranians have crossed to Türkiye via the Kapıköy (Van), Gürbulak (Ağrı), and Esendere (Hakkari) crossings, with daily combined volumes remaining below pre-crisis levels throughout the period. Some report precautionary short-term relocation while assessing the situation in Iran. Those crossing back into Iran often cite efforts to reconnect with family amid communication disruptions linked due to internet outages.

UNHCR—the only UN agency with a permanent presence at the Türkiye-Iran border—has been closely monitoring developments and coordinating with authorities, partners, and refugee-led

organizations. To strengthen readiness, three Farsi speaking staff were deployed to key border crossing points on 3 March to interview new arrivals and support immediate protection needs, with additional staff deployed to support border monitoring and coordination.

Preparedness measures for any significant increase in arrivals continue under the leadership of the Turkish Ministry of Interior’s Presidency of Migration Management, with UNHCR supporting inter-agency coordination.

Coordination

In Iran, the inter-agency response is coordinated through the Refugee Coordination Forum, in close collaboration with the Government's Centre for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (CAFIA) and relevant line ministries and local NGOs. In Lebanon, the Government leads the inter-agency emergency response within the existing Lebanon Response Plan (LRP) framework.

In Iran's neighbouring countries, UNHCR is working with governments and partners to strengthen preparedness measures. Should large-scale refugee movements take place, UNHCR will lead the inter-agency refugee response in support of national authorities, with the development of a regional Refugee Response Plan as relevant.

Ongoing needs

As the conflict intensifies across the region, hardship is deepening for internally displaced families, newly uprooted communities, refugees, returnees, and host populations. Continuous aerial strikes and insecurity are limiting access to essential services, and undermining livelihoods. Loss of income is a growing concern—particularly for female-headed households in Iran—forcing families to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as pulling children from school and skipping meals. Access to food, health care, and other basic services is under severe strain, especially in urban areas hosting large displaced and refugee populations.

Despite efforts to scale up, critical gaps persist across affected countries due to limited funding, access constraints, and overcrowded shelters. In Lebanon, rising needs and insufficient shelter capacity are exacerbating vulnerabilities, with heightened risks of child protection concerns and

gender-based violence. Repeated displacement and prolonged economic hardship are taking a severe psychological toll, underscoring the urgent need for sustained mental health and psychosocial support. Beyond immediate shelter needs, communities require financial aid, strengthened protection services including counselling and legal documentation support.

In Afghanistan, returnees face significant challenges securing employment, housing, and access to food, water, and health care in an already fragile humanitarian environment. Without adequate financial aid and support for return, communities cannot adequately rebuild, and people may be forced into further displacement.

Across all affected countries, despite the support provided by UNHCR and partners, many families are in dire need of shelter, basic needs, and essential health care.

Donor acknowledgement

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors for the Middle East Emergency response. Donors that contributed \$100,000 and above to the emergency response:

France | Germany | Ireland | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Private Donors

UNHCR also extends its sincere appreciation to donors who have contributed softly earmarked and unearmarked funding to UNHCR's operations in the region and globally, enabling a flexible and timely response:

Australia | Belgium | Denmark | Germany | Ireland | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland

Flexible funding

Flexible funds help UNHCR to prepare for the unpredictable, to kick-start an emergency response, and to help displaced people in forgotten or under-resourced crises. They also enable UNHCR to plan and manage resources efficiently and effectively to help save and transform lives.

Without flexible funding, we would not be able to properly prepare for any new emergency that may arise. Without flexible funding, the first phase of our emergency response, which delivers thousands of emergency supplies, essential shelter and protection assistance to families in need, would struggle to get off the ground.

Flexible funding is especially important as our emergency response develops, and we provide longer-term support to displaced people and their host communities. When emergencies fade from the spotlight, flexible funding enables us to help those who are suffering most.

Cover photo: UNHCR and partners distribute relief items in Adra Saida Governorate in south Lebanon, on 5 March, 2026. © UNHCR/Houssam Hariri