



Middle East Emergency Three-Month Impact Report

MARCH-MAY 2026

KEY FIGURES



151,000 Afghan refugees assisted in Iran through helplines, financial aid, and psychosocial support.



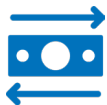
97,000 helpline calls in Iran answered, providing critical information and legal assistance.



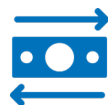
86,400 people supported in collective shelters across Lebanon.



263,100 emergency relief items distributed in and outside collective shelters across Lebanon.



12,600 people received Emergency Protection Cash Assistance in Lebanon.



11,400 returnees to Syria provided with financial aid.



8,500 people received mental health and psychosocial support in Lebanon.



19,000 refugees provided with counselling on return from Lebanon to Syria.

Humanitarian context

The military escalation in the Middle East that began on 28 February 2026 has evolved into a highly volatile regional crisis, marked by sustained hostilities, growing displacement, and escalating humanitarian needs. Intensified conflict in Iran and Lebanon has triggered far-reaching humanitarian consequences across the region, including refugee returns to Afghanistan and Syria under adverse conditions. Even before the recent escalation, more than 24 million people across the affected countries were already forcibly displaced prior to February 2026.

Forced displacement has been directly triggered by the escalation of hostilities, particularly in Lebanon, where more than 1 million people—including Syrian refugees—remain internally displaced despite ongoing ceasefire negotiations. Displacement is becoming increasingly protracted, with repeated movements complicating population tracking and response efforts, while exacerbating vulnerabilities and protection risks. In Iran, significant temporary relocations have occurred, with many individuals now likely returning to their areas of habitual residence, although the situation

remains fluid and uncertain. These dynamics are compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities and heightening the risk of secondary displacement.

Border monitoring has been strengthened across affected contexts. Since the onset of the crisis, large-scale new refugee flows have not yet materialized, although the situation remains highly uncertain. Over 389,000 Iranian nationals have crossed into neighbouring countries, while over 333,000 crossings into Iran have been recorded over the same period. In addition, over 107,000 Lebanese refugees have crossed into Syria. The crisis has also prompted refugee returns under adverse circumstances, including over 444,000 Syrians returning from Lebanon and almost 194,000 Afghans returning from Iran. Reintegration for these returnees remains extremely difficult as Afghanistan and Syria require more sustained support to rebuild fragile communities and structures.

Across affected countries, [inter-agency protection analysis](#) highlights severe threats to life, safety,

dignity and well-being of civilian populations. These risks are particularly acute for children, women and girls, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Monitoring further indicates that refugees and other undocumented foreigners face heightened protection risks such as restricted freedom of movement, increased detention or deportation and loss of access to humanitarian and protection services, livelihood opportunities, healthcare and education.

The socioeconomic impacts of this crisis add another challenge to the humanitarian response. Current projections suggest that the conflict could lead to uneven development reversals globally, with up to 32.5 million people pushed into poverty due to a combination of energy affordability and availability challenges, rising food prices, and economic downturns. This is occurring at a time of substantial reductions in funding for humanitarian and development action, impacting the ability to enable communities affected by displacement to rebuild and recover after the conflict.

UNHCR's response

Since the onset of the conflict, UNHCR has rapidly mobilized to support displaced populations, leveraging a network of more than 40 offices across affected and at-risk countries. Pre-positioned regional emergency stockpiles—including those in Dubai—have enabled the swift delivery of essential items such as tents, blankets and solar lamps. UNHCR colleagues in Iran and across the region utilized remote working arrangements to ensure continuity of services for people forced to flee, while also expanding hotline capacity to respond to refugee concerns.

Iran

Iran hosts the biggest refugee population in the sub-region (1.65 million people), predominantly Afghans. UNHCR maintains the largest UN agency

On 4 March, UNHCR declared a Level 2 emergency to scale up operations in Iran and strengthen regional preparedness. The United Nations 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). Supported by a coordination team in Amman, Jordan, the CRRC ensures a coherent, protection-centred inter-agency preparedness and response across the region.

presence in Iran, with field coverage across all affected areas, and has worked closely with

the Government of Iran for decades to support inclusive refugee policies.

UNHCR's [monitoring in Iran](#) shows that the protection environment for Afghan refugees has significantly deteriorated since the escalation of conflict in late February 2026, marked by worsening inflation, unemployment and rising living costs as well as reduced access to essential services. This has contributed to evictions, the adoption of harmful coping strategies, and widespread psychosocial distress. Persistent challenges in securing and renewing documentation further limit access to essential services and legal protections. Despite these conditions, Afghan refugees consistently report a preference to remain in Iran, as return or onward

movement is widely perceived as unsafe and not viable. Although immediate conflict-related risks have eased since the ceasefire, concerns have shifted from crisis needs to persistent economic hardship and legal insecurity. In response to these growing needs, UNHCR has expanded its helpline services, which received nearly 97,000 calls between March and May 2026, with close to 8,400 households requiring follow-up. In parallel, around 11,000 individuals approached UNHCR offices across the country. Through these and other channels, UNHCR has provided assistance to around 151,000 Afghan refugees in Iran, including counselling, legal aid, multi-purpose cash assistance, and psychosocial support.

Zahra, a 29-year-old living in Shiraz, has faced significant challenges in supporting her family following the onset of the crisis in Iran and the wider region, as casual and seasonal work opportunities diminished. Residing with her elderly parents and younger siblings, including a 17-year-old brother suffering from a serious illness, she has been under considerable financial and psychological strain.

When doctors recommended a bone marrow biopsy for her brother, Zahra was unable to

afford private healthcare and encountered delays within the overstretched public hospital system. In response, she sought assistance from UNHCR. While the family was already enrolled in the Universal Public Health Insurance scheme, UNHCR facilitated the scheduling of a hospital appointment in June. Following a needs assessment, the family will soon receive financial support from UNHCR to help cover part of their ongoing medical and related expenses.

Afghanistan

Since the onset of the crisis, more than 487,000 people have returned from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan, bringing the total number of returns in 2026 to about 754,000 as of 31 May. The majority of these returns have been involuntary and associated with significant protection concerns. Returnees are arriving in a country already facing severe humanitarian and economic challenges, requiring support at border points and in areas of origin to mitigate protection risks and support more sustainable reintegration.

UNHCR and partners have provided more than 58,000 hot meals at borders, conducted protection screening, and delivered financial aid to nearly 88,000 returnees. People with specific needs identified at borders have been referred to specialized services, including legal assistance, protection case management, child protection, psychosocial support, health, and livelihoods assistance. Unaccompanied and separated children are being prioritized for family tracing and reunification, as well as follow up support.

Armenia

Movements of Iranian nationals through the Agarak border crossing point remained steady between 28 February and 31 May, with nearly 42,000 entries into Armenia and almost 41,000 exits to Iran. These movements were primarily associated with routine individual and commercial travel, with no indication of large-scale family displacement. UNHCR supported government-led efforts through coordination and technical expertise on preparedness, protection, and access to asylum.

A total of 404 individuals approached UNHCR and NGO partners, including 299 newly arrived

individuals seeking information on legal status, asylum procedures, accommodation, and available assistance. UNHCR and partners provided information to 380 individuals and counselling, including legal aid, to 108 people. In addition, 302 individuals were referred for service provision, including support with asylum procedures, while 32 households with heightened protection risks received case management support. Furthermore, 35 individuals benefited from time-bound financial aid.

Iraq

Small numbers of Iranian asylum-seekers have arrived in Iraq, citing the hostilities as the primary reason for flight. These cross-border movements remain consistent with previous trends, and UNHCR continues to process registrations through existing procedures.

Since the onset of the crisis, UNHCR's helpline has remained operational, receiving calls from asylum-seekers and refugees. While registration centres were intermittently closed at the start of the crisis

due to the security situation, they have been fully operational since early April in Baghdad, Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah, providing protection services to refugees.

UNHCR teams are also in contact with Iranian asylum-seekers and refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq who were further displaced from settlements due to drone strikes. UNHCR continues to advocate with authorities to ensure their needs are adequately addressed.

Lebanon

The hostilities in Lebanon have caused widespread displacement, with over one million people self-registered as displaced through the Government's relief platform. As Israeli forces occupy parts of southern Lebanon and continue to issue evacuation orders for cities such as Tyre, many people are being forced to flee repeatedly in search of safety. As of 31 May 2026, over 127,000 internally displaced people are hosted in 631 emergency shelters, while the majority of affected families continue to rely on host communities and informal accommodation.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs and within the framework of the Lebanon Response Plan, UNHCR continues to scale up life-saving assistance across the country, including protection services, shelter support, emergency relief items, and financial aid for displaced Lebanese and refugees. Needs are rapidly increasing, while operational conditions remain highly challenging. A total of 76 collective shelters are currently receiving repair and maintenance support, benefitting more than 15,000 displaced individuals.

UNHCR is also expanding its Cash for Shelter programme for vulnerable refugee families residing outside collective shelters. To date, approximately 180 of the 600 targeted families have received \$250 to cover rent and other immediate shelter costs. More than 86,000 displaced people in collective shelters have been supported with over 221,000 essential items, while over 12,000 displaced people in host communities and informal settings have received more than 41,000.

UNHCR continues to play a central role in emergency financial aid for refugees. More than 128,000 refugees have been reached through the joint UNHCR–WFP Emergency Multipurpose Cash Assistance programme, while over 12,000 displaced refugees facing acute protection

risks have received Emergency Protection Cash Assistance.

UNHCR and partners provided support to more than 85,000 people in 19 Community Development Centres across the country. Overall, more than 37,000 people have been reached through information provision, awareness-raising, and counselling on services and protection risks, while nearly 8,500 individuals benefited from mental health and psychosocial support.

Since the launch of assistance for return to Syria under Force Majeure conditions on 1 April 2026, over 19,000 individuals have received counselling on return options, and over 11,000 Syrian refugees have returned to Syria, each receiving financial aid of \$100 per person.

Syria

Population movements from Lebanon into Syria through the four official border crossings remained within operational capacity and relatively stable, though influenced by developments in Lebanon as well as seasonal factors.

Since 2 March, around 444,000 Syrians returnees and 117,000 Lebanese refugees have crossed into Syria. Among Syrians, more than 115,000 have indicated an intention to return permanently, while many others remain in a wait-and-see situation.

Engagement with border authorities continues to facilitate the verification of arrivals and the monitoring of movements. Protection concerns persist across crossing points, particularly regarding gaps in civil documentation—including unregistered children and unformalized

marriages—which may affect access to services upon return.

UNHCR and partners have supported Syrian refugees in Lebanon with legal information, counselling, and financial aid prior to their return to Syria. At key crossing points, returnees have received protection assistance, transportation, follow-up service, and referrals. A mobile clinic remains operational at Joussieh, while activities at Arida have been scaled down due to lower arrival numbers.

As returns increase, needs are shifting to areas of return, where they are rapidly outpacing available resources. UNHCR-supported community centres continued to provide integrated protection support to hundreds of thousands of Syrian returnees, prioritizing the most vulnerable groups.



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Displaced multiple times in search of safety

Lebanese displaced family Sana (51), her daughter Eman (12) and her son Abdullah (14) had to take shelter in a stadium in Beirut. They fled from Dahiyeh, a southern suburb of capital Beirut in the early hours of 2 March after Israeli attacks began. They had to flee a further two times before finding relative safety.

“I was awake for suhoor Sunday night. It was 3am and I suddenly started to hear the sound of strikes hitting the neighborhood. I had no idea about what was happening. I immediately woke up my son and daughter and left home. **Everyone was fleeing their homes, shouting and crying.**”

We spent the night on the street, until Monday afternoon. We went back to home to take few clothes quickly and left again. We went to my brother's home in Ouzai and spent a few days there, until Israeli evacuation orders reached Ouzai too. So we left to the Cornish coastal area in Beirut, to be safe. Next day we found a home in Ras El-Nabaa, staying with 18 people in a small room. On Friday morning we had to find another place again. Finally, we came to this stadium and took shelter.

Now have a tent, but it's very cold here in the night. We have three blankets, we pile them on and hug each other so we can sleep.”

Türkiye

Between late February and 7 June, over 334,000 Iranian nationals entered Türkiye, while around 293,000 exited the country to return to Iran. Movements continue largely under the visa exemption regime and primarily reflect routine travel patterns. While some individuals cite recent developments in Iran as a reason for crossing, flows remain mixed, with potential international protection needs identified among certain arrivals.

UNHCR has strengthened coordination with UN agencies, partners, and local authorities, including in border regions, to enhance preparedness and information management. Response capacities are being mapped and data coordination reinforced in the event of contingency plan activation, alongside regular inter-agency engagement with civil society actors, particularly in Van (Turkish province bordering Iran).

Coordination

In Iran, the inter-agency refugee response is coordinated through the Refugee Coordination Forum, in close collaboration with the Government's Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (CAFIA), relevant line ministries, and local NGOs.

An [Inter-agency Flash Refugee Response Plan](#) (RRP), launched on 26 March covering the period of March-May 2026, appealed for \$80 million to support 2.8 million people, including \$36.23 million for UNHCR. As of 31 May, the RRP was only 24% funded, leaving substantial gaps in the provision of life-saving assistance, including protection services, financial aid, and access to basic services.

Work is ongoing to update the Country Refugee Response Plan, combining immediate humanitarian assistance with broader priorities for 2026, including protection, basic needs, and

resilience-oriented support for refugees and host communities in Iran.

In Lebanon, the Government leads the emergency response within the framework of the Lebanon Response Plan (LRP). A Flash Appeal complements the LRP to deliver life-saving assistance and protection, including for Syrian refugees.

The [2026 Lebanon Flash Appeal](#) seeks \$308 million and was 60% funded as at the end of May, while [UNHCR's emergency appeal](#) is only 45% funded against \$61 million required. A revised [Flash Appeal](#), reflecting rising needs and prolonged displacement, was launched on 5 June.

In Afghanistan, the response to returns is integrated into the [Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan](#).

In countries neighbouring Iran, UNHCR has been working with governments and partners to strengthen preparedness.

Ongoing needs

Across all contexts, displacement is becoming increasingly protracted, with repeated movements deepening vulnerabilities and complicating response efforts. Protection risks are rising, including eviction, child labour, gender-based violence and lack of documentation. Psychological distress is also increasing, particularly among children and caregivers, underscoring the urgent need for expanded mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Despite the efforts of UNHCR and partners, many families across affected countries remain in urgent need of shelter, basic assistance, protection services, and access to essential healthcare.

In Iran, protection interviews conducted at border crossings with Afghanistan, including Zaranj and Islam Qala, continue to indicate large numbers of Afghans being deported. Deportees report arrests during attempted re-entry, as well as during travel, routine checks, and at workplaces. They also cite wage loss, family separation, and inadequate food and water in detention. Returnees further report economic hardship, high food prices, unemployment, lack of documentation, legal uncertainty, and a continued risk of detention.

In Lebanon, ongoing conflict and displacement is increasing protection risks for people forced to flee, particularly women and girls, while restricting access to healthcare, shelter and humanitarian assistance. Attacks on civilian and emergency infrastructure continue to disrupt essential services and operations. The situation is becoming untenable for many displaced families, especially those in overburdened areas. Families are increasingly resorting to harmful coping mechanisms, including reducing essential spending and relying on child labour. People with

disabilities, those with chronic illness, pregnant and breastfeeding women, widows and female-headed households remain particularly at risk. High levels of psychological distress among children and caregivers underscore the urgent need for mental health and psychosocial support.

In Afghanistan, border monitoring indicates that many returns are driven by pressure rather than informed choice, with returnees citing movement restrictions, limited livelihoods and services, and fear of arrest. Deportees report arrests, family separation, asset loss, document confiscation and poor detention conditions. Women—particularly widows—face additional risks, including limited income opportunities, lack of documentation, psychosocial distress and forced marriage, while unaccompanied and separated children continue to be identified and referred for family tracing and support.

At the same time, hostilities have prompted some refugees to return to **Syria** from Lebanon under adverse conditions, including individuals who may still require international protection. Protection concerns persist at crossing points, particularly due to gaps in civil documentation—including unregistered children and unformalized marriages—which may hinder access to services upon return. These large-scale returns from Lebanon are expanding both the scale and geographic scope of protection needs in areas of return, necessitating increased investment in protection monitoring, MHPSS, gender-based violence, child protection services, legal assistance, and mine action.

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:

Australia | Austria | Canada | Cyprus | Czechia | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Luxembourg | Norway | Republic of Korea | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Central Emergency Response Fund | Australia for UNHCR | Chellaram Foundation | España con ACNUR | Grundfos Foundation | Loulwa Bakr | Private donors in Canada | Private donors in Denmark | Private donors in Italy | Private donors in Thailand | The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | UK for UNHCR | Sweden for UNHCR | Qatar Charity

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 | Finland | Germany | Ireland | Netherlands (Kingdom of the) | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Adyen | Australia for UNHCR | EA Foundation | España con ACNUR | Japan for UNHCR | Portugal com ACNUR | Private donors in Hong Kong | Private donors in Italy | Private donors in the Republic of Korea | UK for UNHCR | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | USA for UNHCR | VP Capital

Flexible funding: a lifeline in emergencies

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.