



SAVING
LIVES
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LIVES

MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL ESCALATION EMERGENCY RESPONSE Situation Report #3 19 March 2026

IN NUMBERS



265,000 displaced people assisted in **Lebanon** with food and cash to date.



40,000 displaced people received date bars at **Syria** crossings.

32,500 refugees in settlements assisted with cash top-ups in **Iran**.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- WFP warns that continued escalation in the Middle East risks becoming the most severe disruption to humanitarian supply chains since COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, with potential spillover effects on the global economy and fertilizer markets. If instability persists beyond mid-year, an additional 45 million people could potentially be pushed into acute hunger in 2026.
- In Iran, WFP provided cash top-ups to more than 32,500 Afghan refugees in settlements to help them meet their immediate food needs amid ongoing escalation.
- In Lebanon, since 2 March, WFP has reached 265,000 conflict-affected people with food and cash assistance in shelters and across communities. WFP led two interagency convoys to southern Lebanon with the Logistics Cluster, delivering food and essential relief items on behalf of UN and NGO partners to support approximately 6,200 conflict-affected people.
- In Syria, WFP has provided over 40,000 date bars to newly arriving families from Lebanon at Jdeidet Yabous and Jousieh crossings.

Situation Update

- Hostilities remain widespread and unabated across the Middle East, undermining civilian safety, disrupting trade, and driving displacement. These dynamics are triggering global supply disruptions and price shocks that disproportionately affect food-import-dependent countries.
- [New analysis](#) indicates that nearly 45 million additional people could fall into acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or worse) if the conflict persists beyond mid-year and oil prices remain above USD 100 per barrel, adding to the 318 million people already food insecure worldwide.
- WFP projections suggest a risk of a repeat of the 2022 global hunger surge triggered by the war in Ukraine, when food prices spiked rapidly and remained elevated, pushing vulnerable households out of food markets for prolonged periods.
- WFP assesses that the Middle East crisis could cause the most significant disruption to humanitarian supply chains since COVID and the onset of the Ukraine war. WFP's shipping costs have already increased by around 18-20 percent. Rising fuel and shipping costs, port congestion, and sourcing challenges are increasing operational complexity and delays.
- Disruptions to maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea are already driving up energy and fertilizer costs, with cascading effects on transport, inflation, and food prices well beyond the region. Import-dependent countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are most exposed, with projected increases in

food insecurity of up to 24 percent in Asia and over 20 percent in parts of Africa.

- These risks are unfolding amid severe funding shortfalls, constraining WFP's ability to respond and increasing the likelihood of worsening food insecurity in countries already at risk of famine.

WFP Response

- Since the crisis began, and following the activation of the Corporate Focus emergency phase for the Middle East Regional Escalation across nine countries (Iran, Armenia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, Syria, Türkiye, and Yemen), WFP quickly adapted its operations to meet immediate food needs.
- Building on its extensive emergency preparedness, including contingency planning and pre-positioned food stocks, WFP was able to mobilize an immediate, coordinated response as the crisis escalated.

Iran

- Iranian authorities [indicated](#) that between 600,000 to 1 million households in Tehran and in other major urban centres are believed to have temporarily left their homes to seek safety. WFP continues to monitor population movements into the refugees settlements and food price trends, to adapt its response as needs evolve. With an additional 7,000 Afghan refugees already reported into settlements, WFP's assisted caseload is expected to increase further.
- So far, markets remain functional in Iran with food availability stabilizing by early March. Prices for selected food commodities have shown some slight increase.
- WFP operations in the country continue without interruption, assisting approximately 33,000 Afghan refugees across 20 settlements with food and cash including daily bread through WFP-supported bakeries and wheat flour distributions supporting home-based baking in smaller locations.
- In response to the ongoing escalation and following the approval of the Center for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (CAFIA), WFP provided a one-off cash top-up (IRR 4 million; USD 3) to 32,552 refugees across 20 settlements.
- Under an upcoming three-month UN flash appeal, **WFP requires USD 7.1 million, to assist 45,000 refugees living in Iran settlements** through monthly cash entitlements and wheat flour. In addition,

100,000 refugees living outside settlements will receive monthly cash-based transfers for three months, along with 100,000 individuals from host communities.

Lebanon

- Amid intensified and widespread airstrikes across Lebanon, as of 17 March, nearly 134,000 IDPs are staying in 631 shelters. Shelter capacity remains under significant strain, with reports of thousands of displaced individuals sleeping in streets across Beirut and other major cities, leaving many exposed to harsh weather conditions, and an already severe humanitarian situation.
- During the second week of March, essential food prices continued to rise in Lebanon, increasing pressure on household purchasing power. The Food Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) reached USD 42.5 per person, a 4 percent increase from February, while the Food Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) climbed to USD 61.1, up 8 percent from February's average. Food prices are expected to rise further in the coming weeks.
- WFP continues to swiftly respond to the urgent needs of people affected by the ongoing conflict. Since 2 March, **WFP has reached 265,000 conflict-affected people with food and cash assistance in shelters and across communities.**
 - In coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and under the Shock Responsive Social Safety Net (SRSN), WFP transferred emergency cash assistance to around 9,100 people (1,821 households) trapped in five southern border villages (Ain Ebel, Debel, Qaouzah, Rmeich, and Aalma Ech Chaab). Overall, since 02 March, WFP reached almost 192,000 individuals with cash assistance.
 - WFP, through cooperating partners and in collaboration with the Government of Lebanon, has also launched its first emergency food distribution of Ready-To-Eat (RTEs) and food parcels outside shelters reaching 8,200 IDPs (335 households) in Akkar (north).
 - Inside shelters, WFP assisted 78,400 IDPs across 301 shelters since 2 March, with hot meals, light Ready-to-Eat (RTEs), food parcels (dry rations), packs of bread, and snacks. Overall, WFP reached around 87,000 conflict affected people with food

assistance inside and outside shelters since 2 March.

- This week, WFP led two interagency convoys to southern Lebanon in collaboration with the Logistics Cluster. One convoy of four trucks delivered RTEs, water, blankets, mattresses, and hygiene kits on behalf of WFP, UNICEF, AVSI, and Shield, supporting around 2,000 conflict-affected people. A second convoy of seven trucks transported RTEs, bread, hygiene kits, mattresses, sleeping mats, and dignity kits on behalf of WFP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR, and Shield to the southern border village of Rmeich, assisting approximately 4,200 people.
- The Logistics and Telecommunication Cluster has been activated this week. Efforts are underway to establish dedicated warehouse services to meet rising operational needs.
- With rising needs outpacing available resources, **WFP urgently requires USD 72.5 million to sustain emergency operations in Lebanon for three months.** This funding is critical to support IDPs in shelters and expand assistance to a growing number of almost 1 million affected people.

Syria

- As of the 16 of March, over 140,000 Syrians and over 14,000 Lebanese have crossed into Syria, including Syrian refugees who had already planned to return, as well as others fleeing the ongoing conflict.
- WFP has provided over **40,000 date bars to newly arriving families** at Jdeidet Yabous and Jousieh and continues coordination with authorities to plan support at final destinations.
- For the next six months (March – August 2026), **WFP Syria requires USD 175 million to sustain its regular operations.**

Afghanistan

- Iran hosts millions of refugees, mostly Afghans, who are particularly vulnerable, given their already precarious situation and limited support networks. About 27,800 have [returned](#) to Afghanistan since 28 February.
- WFP is prepared to scale up support for increased returns; however, severe funding shortfalls continue to constrain response capacity. In light of the intensified conflict along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border and

the broader Middle East escalation, **WFP urgently requires USD 15.2 million to assist 320,000 people**—including 140,000 IDPs and 180,000 returnees from Iran—through food and nutrition assistance.



When the shelling started in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Roukaya and her family had only minutes to leave. Half asleep, she gathered her children and rushed down the stairs with the rest of the building. Roads quickly filled with cars as families tried to escape. On the way, their car broke down. They abandoned it and began moving from one place to another, searching for schools that were open as shelters. They changed locations several times before finally finding a place to stay.

Today, Roukaya shares a small room in a school in Beirut with two other families, ten people living together in tight conditions. The simplest daily tasks have become difficult. There is limited access to water, no space for laundry, and food is often not enough.

During the first days, they slept on the floor without pillows.



In a crisis like this, no one is comfortable except in their own home,” she says.

Displaced for the third time in her life, she tries to stay strong for her children.

From the very first hours of the escalation, WFP rapidly mobilized its emergency response alongside humanitarian partners. Today, over a million people have been displaced, 130,000 of them seeking refuge in schools and emergency shelters.

Despite the uncertainty, Roukaya says her main hope is to return home and rebuild her life.

Contacts

For further information, please contact menaero.oim@wfp.org