Escalation in Lebanon amid Widening Regional Conflict

UN Women Flash Update #1

6 March 2026

SITUATION OVERVIEW

On 2 March 2026, following attacks by Hezbollah, Israeli airstrikes struck Beirut's southern suburbs and multiple locations across Lebanon, marking the most significant escalation since the November 2024 ceasefire. This escalation is occurring against the backdrop of Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis, protracted displacement, and weakened public services, further exacerbating already acute humanitarian vulnerabilities.

As of 5 March, 102 people have been killed and 638 injured. The latest data indicate that approximately 100,372 people are internally displaced, including an estimated 50,366 women and girls, across 22,950 households. Among these are around 4,000 female-headed households, more than 1,600 households headed by persons with disabilities, and over 5,200 households headed by older persons.

The displacement has placed acute pressure on shelter capacity. According to the Government of Lebanon's Disaster Risk Management Unit, 95,773 people are registered in official shelters. As of 3 March, shelters in Beirut were already nearing maximum capacity, and 420 of the 478 activated shelters nationwide are currently full.

GENDER DIMENSIONS & RISKS

Protection Risks: Large-scale and rapid displacement, often occurring at night and under highly stressful conditions, heightens protection risks for women and girls, including harassment, gender-based violence (GBV), exploitation, abuse, and trafficking. These risks are further compounded when families become separated during displacement or relocate to overcrowded collective shelters. As of 3 March, the Ministry of Social Affairs reported that shelters in Beirut were already nearing maximum capacity.

In such conditions, access to basic hygiene services, including menstrual hygiene management, can deteriorate rapidly. Overcrowded shelters frequently lack adequate sanitation facilities, privacy, and essential supplies, undermining women's and girls' health, mobility, safety, and dignity.

Social Impact: The conflict is also straining relations between displaced populations and host communities. Reports from several areas indicate growing concerns among some residents that hosting displaced families may increase exposure to attacks or create perceived security risks. In cases where displaced families face rejection, suspicion, or repeated pressure to relocate, women often bear primary responsibility for securing shelter, maintaining family unity, and protecting children and older relatives in unfamiliar and sometimes difficult environments.

Security concerns and screening practices may also contribute to family separation, including situations where women and children are more readily accepted than men perceived as potential security risks. Humanitarian partners further report that some displaced women face barriers to accessing rental accommodation, including refusals linked to visible religious identity or perceived political affiliation.

Essential Services: The escalation is disrupting essential services that were already severely weakened by Lebanon's protracted economic crisis, conflict-related damage, and chronic funding shortfalls. Even before the current crisis, households in conflict-affected areas faced significant barriers to basic services: 12 per cent reported unmet healthcare needs, 41 per cent experienced insufficient access to water, and 26

per cent could not afford the direct costs of education.

As displacement increases and infrastructure is repurposed for emergency response—including the use of public schools as collective shelters—these pressures are expected to intensify, further constraining access to health, water, and education services. Safety and mobility concerns were already affecting service access, according to the 2025 MSNA in conflict-affected areas: 15 per cent of respondents reported avoiding leaving their homes, with risks most frequently reported on streets after dark (62 per cent), in neighbourhoods (24 per cent), in markets (18 per cent), and on public transportation (11 per cent). In the current context of heightened insecurity and displacement, these constraints are likely to further limit safe access to essential services, particularly for women and girls.

Unequal Care Responsibilities: The current displacement crisis is placing additional strain on Lebanon's already fragile care system. With 478 collective shelters—many of them public schools repurposed for emergency use—and increasing numbers of families hosting displaced relatives and friends, living conditions are becoming more crowded. As a result, dependency ratios are likely rising above the pre-crisis baseline of 13 per cent in conflict-affected areas.

In a context where formal care services were already limited and households carried most caregiving responsibilities, unpaid care demands are increasing and continue to fall disproportionately on women and girls. Care needs are also becoming more complex, particularly in households supporting children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals experiencing psychosocial distress. This growing burden is contributing to heightened psychosocial strain and underscores the urgent need for accessible mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), safe referral pathways, and practical support to ease care workloads.

UN WOMEN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PRIORITIES

In line with its mandate to advance gender equality in humanitarian settings and its core commitments in humanitarian action, UN Women is scaling up its response to address the urgent needs of women and girls. This includes delivering targeted support, strengthening accountability to gender commitments across the humanitarian response, and amplifying women's voices and leadership in decision-making.

UN Women's interventions complement large-scale humanitarian operations by ensuring that protection, gender equality, and women's participation and leadership are systematically integrated across the response.

UN WOMEN's RESPONSE FOCUSES ON THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES:

Lifesaving protection and livelihood support to crisis-affected women and girls

Provide life-saving protection support to women and girls in the most-affected areas, including in collective shelters and among host communities in conflict-affected locations (South Lebanon, Nabatieh, Bekaa, and Beirut/Mount Lebanon). Interventions will adopt **intersectional targeting**, prioritizing women facing overlapping vulnerabilities, including women with disabilities, older women, women with diverse SOGIESC, migrant domestic workers, and female-headed households.

Protection assistance includes life-saving legal assistance, covering civil documentation support, protection orders, and legal counselling, GBV risk mitigation, access to information, and safe referral pathways, emergency shelter, and protection cash assistance in shelters and host communities. Community facilitators and outreach mechanisms will support women facing mobility constraints, documentation barriers, or social exclusion to safely access information, assistance, and referral pathways.

The response will also provide **targeted protection-linked cash assistance and emergency livelihood opportunities** to help women sustain their households and maintain economic agency. This will be delivered through partnerships with 34 women-led organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), supporting community-based response activities such as hot meal distributions through community kitchens and the production of disposable menstrual hygiene pads.

Strengthening accountability towards gender commitments

Lead the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) coordination, providing gender technical expertise to humanitarian partners and sector working groups to integrate gender analysis, sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data, and gender-responsive approaches across humanitarian interventions. This will strengthen accountability in coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance towards gender equality commitments including gender-, age-, and disability-inclusive approaches, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Enable evidence-based, gender-sensitive humanitarian planning through Rapid Gender Analysis and strengthened gender data to inform the Flash Appeal, sector response plans, and humanitarian decision-making.

Amplifying women's voices and leadership in humanitarian response

Strengthen the participation of women and women-led organizations as decision-makers and frontline actors by engaging them in and enabling provision of community outreach, needs identification, protection services, referral support and mitigation of community tensions and advocate for humanitarian funding to be directed through women-led organizations. **UN Women has partnerships and collaborations with over 150 women-led organizations and a network of 500 women peacebuilders across the country**, which ensures that priorities of diverse groups of women inform humanitarian planning and service delivery.

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EMERGENCY FUNDING NEEDS

UN Women has already reprogrammed USD 1.5 million from existing resources to activate an immediate emergency response, which will reach an estimated 25,519 women and girls with direct assistance.

UN Women is seeking an additional USD 4 million to reach an additional 92,250 women and girls affected by the crisis. An additional 756,800 individuals will be reached indirectly. This additional funding will enable UN Women and its partners to deliver integrated support across key priority areas, including protection and gender-based violence response, multi-purpose cash assistance and emergency livelihoods support, mental health and psychosocial support and care, rapid gender analysis and gender alerts to inform humanitarian action, and women's community mediation and leadership in crisis response and social cohesion efforts.

Given the fluid and rapidly evolving context, these requirements remain indicative and may be adjusted as the situation develops, needs deepen, and humanitarian access conditions change.