

La Niña and water crisis: anticipated risks in 2026

SITUATION OVERVIEW

By mid-October 2025, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center had declared La Niña conditions, which are expected to persist until February/March 2026 (NOAA 08/01/2026). La Niña, together with El Niño, is one of the two extreme phases of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation phenomenon – a natural climate variability occurrence characterised by oscillations in the sea surface temperatures of the equatorial Pacific Ocean. Both El Niño and La Niña are associated with temperature and precipitation anomalies across the world, and more detailed information on El Niño–Southern Oscillation and La Niña can be found in our [La Niña impact report for 2024–2025](#) (IRI accessed 11/11/2025).

La Niña typically brings reduced precipitation across West Asia during autumn, winter, and spring, significantly heightening drought risks in vulnerable areas (FEWS NET 2020; Alizadeh and Mousavizadeh 24/11/2024; Zoljoodi and Didevarasl 01/2013). The region is already experiencing more frequent and intense droughts, largely attributed to increasing temperatures and human-induced climate change, which are compounding socioeconomic water stressors, threatening food, water security, and stability, and enhancing social inequalities (WWA 08/11/2023; ISPI 18/12/2025).

Between October–November 2025, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria experienced below-average precipitation, affecting the start of the rainy season. Between late December 2025 and January 2026, rainfall across northern Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and large parts of Syria brought some relief to dry conditions, which may support crop development in 2026. Between December–January, northern Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and northern Syria also experienced heavy precipitation events, cold waves, and localised flooding, indicating increasing exposure to climate extremes (The New Arab 21/01/2026; IFRC 22/12/2025; ECHO 29/01/2026; NASA 08/12/2021).

Precipitation levels will be likely insufficient to fully replenish water reserves depleted by the exceptionally dry conditions in 2024–2025, however, potentially extending water scarcity into 2026 (ECMWF accessed 21/01/2026; GEOGLAM 04/12/2025; WFP 12/2025).

Seasonal forecasts anticipate near-normal precipitation between February–June 2026, but indicate a high probability of above-average temperatures during the same period (WMO accessed 09/01/2026; IRI accessed 09/01/2026; 3CS accessed 09/01/2026). This will increase

evapotranspiration and challenge vegetation recovery from the 2025 drought, while irrigation is likely to be affected by low water reserves, leading to a reduction in agricultural outputs, especially wheat (GEOGLAM 12/2025). If January–March 2026 rainfall fails to sufficiently replenish reserves, water scarcity may continue challenging access to domestic water during the dry summer months (June–September). Combined with above-average temperatures, this may heighten risks of waterborne diseases.

Drought is also fuelling community-level tensions, compounding inter- and intra-community disputes over water and land access, particularly in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. Southern Iraq saw an upward trend of water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots in 2025 (MEI/NUS 29/04/2025; ACLED accessed 15/12/2025).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

This report provides an overview of the anticipated humanitarian risks triggered by drought in 2026 across West Asia, aiming to support emergency preparedness and response.

Methodology

This report is based on a review of publicly available secondary data and reports from humanitarian organisations, think tanks, and local and international media, complemented by eight key informant interviews with national and regional experts.

Scope

This report focuses on Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine (West Bank), and Syria, with particular attention to subnational areas where drought, combined with pre-existing crises and hazard vulnerabilities, may threaten security and stability and drive an increase in humanitarian needs in 2026. While Gaza is also affected by increasing temperatures and reduced/erratic precipitation, it has not been included in this analysis because the scale and impact of drought cannot be meaningfully assessed in the context of the overwhelming effects of the armed conflict and unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the area.



Limitations

- This report primarily focuses on the impact of precipitation and temperature anomalies observed during the last quarter of 2025. While La Niña is likely to have contributed to the observed anomalies, it should not be viewed as the sole driver. Global records from 2024 and 2025 indicate a warming trend, highlighting the accelerating influence of human-induced climate change (EU 10/01/2025; WMO 06/11/2025).
- The analysis acknowledges that precipitation and temperature anomalies compound pre-existing drivers of water scarcity. These include transboundary water management challenges, the weaponisation of water in conflict, unsustainable groundwater and surface water extraction for agriculture, weak water infrastructure and governance, and the absence of long-term, sustainable water management policies. These pre-existing drivers fundamentally shape the vulnerability context assessed in this report, but their evolution is not fully captured by the analysis.
- This report highlights the potential security and stability risks that drought conditions could aggravate in 2026. The analysis does not, however, extensively explore and anticipate how these drivers may evolve at the national or regional level but instead focuses on identifying areas where conflict and climate risks may intersect at the community level.
- While the report identifies subnational areas likely to face the most severe drought impacts in 2026, it does not provide a comprehensive overview of all areas potentially affected. As such, some underreported or data-scarce regions may be underrepresented in the analysis.

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COUNTRIES

Iraq

Overview

Iraq has been facing a severe, prolonged drought since 2020, with its water reserves dropping sharply from 60 billion cubic metres in 2020 to only 10 billion by October 2025, the lowest level in 80 years (FEWS NET 13/10/2025; Arab News 25/05/2025). The country relies on the Tigris and Euphrates river systems for an estimated 98% of its surface water, making it highly vulnerable to upstream water management (UNECE 24/03/2023). While a new bilateral water-sharing agreement between Türkiye and Iraq aims to alleviate water scarcity, when implemented, the absence of comprehensive multilateral water treaties between countries on the Euphrates and Tigris water systems continues to constrain long-term water planning (The NewRegion 21/12/2025; KII 04/12/2025 a). Reduced downstream flows resulting from water diversion and storage by Türkiye and Iran, along with reduced precipitation, have compounded domestic water insecurity drivers, such as outdated water infrastructure, inefficient water use in agriculture and industry, surging demand from population growth, urbanisation, and rising groundwater salinisation (CSIS 07/03/2025; Chatham House 01/10/2025; FEWS NET 13/10/2025). In the south, reduced flows from the Tigris and Euphrates into the Shatt Al Arab River have led to a sharp increase in ground and surface water salinity. In 2018, salinity and water shortages rendered an estimated 87% of arable land in Basra governorate unusable (Gulf News 05/11/2018). Salinisation has continued since then, with 2025 recording a sharp rise in water salinity levels compared to 2024, affecting palm groves, citrus trees, and other crops, depleting fish stocks and livestock, and severely limiting access to water for drinking and domestic use (AFP 20/10/2025).

Anticipated risks and humanitarian needs in 2026

Iraq received below-average precipitation in the October–November period, which is crucial to the 2025/2026 agricultural season. This is likely to sustain **pressure on food availability and livelihoods**, potentially affecting wheat production if January–March precipitation is insufficient to sustaining crop growth (FEWS NET 13/10/2025). Agricultural drought forecast models anticipate over 500,000 hectares of land exposed to drought between January–March 2026, especially in southern governates (Mercy Corps accessed 09/01/2026). Smallholder farmers, agricultural labourers, and women-headed households are likely to be the worst affected by livelihood losses (FEWS NET 13/10/2025; KII 04/12/2025 b). At the national level, the impact of drought on food security is partially mitigated by Iraq's Public Distribution System (PDS), which provides subsidised staple food commodities to much of the population. Access

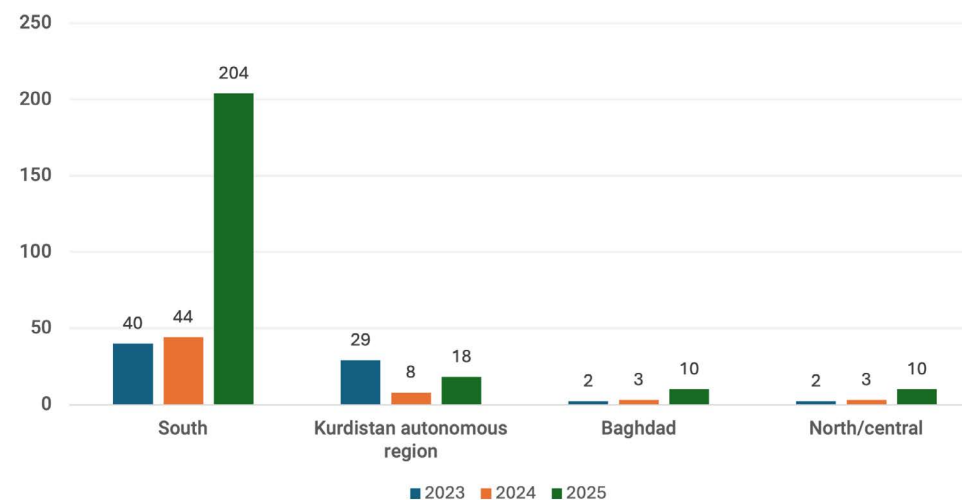
to the PDS is uneven, however, and at-risk and marginalised groups face systemic barriers, including the requirement for valid civil documentation, which remains a challenge for IDPs and individuals who lost documents during previous waves of displacement. Residents in remote areas, as well as in the Kurdistan autonomous region, are also significantly less likely to receive the full entitlements of the system because of structural inequalities caused by access and logistical constraints (FEWS NET 13/10/2025; KII 04/02/2025 b). Financial pressure from declining oil revenues driven by falling global oil prices, together with rising public expenditures, also presents an emerging risk to the sustainability of the PDS and related social protection programmes. If fiscal pressures persist, the Government's capacity to maintain current levels of food assistance may be reduced (FEWS NET 13/10/2025; KUNA 11/01/2026).

In 2026, water scarcity and inadequate WASH infrastructure may create conditions conducive to cholera and other **waterborne disease outbreaks**. Only 37% of households across the country are served by sewage networks, with a high concentration of these being in Baghdad (90% of households served) compared to other provinces (an average of 20% of households served) (EPIC 15/12/2025). Persistent water scarcity concentrates contaminants and increases reliance on unsafe sources, increasing risk of cholera, acute watery diarrhoea, typhoid, and hepatitis B outbreaks (Shafak News 04/09/2025). These conditions most commonly occur between late summer and early winter (August–December), although recent cholera outbreaks have begun in the summer months, reflecting shifts in climate patterns (Hussein et al. 04/07/2025). High-risk cholera areas include peri-urban districts with limited access to piped water, such as the suburbs of Baghdad, rural communities reliant on river or canal water (frequently found in central and southern governorates), and displacement/refugee camps (primarily in north and western Iraq) (Hussein et al. 04/07/2025). In the predominantly Kurdish north and western governorates, there is a near total lack of wastewater treatment capacity (EPIC 15/12/2025). Between January–October 2024, 571 cholera cases were confirmed in Iraq, with the worst-affected governorates – Diyala, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah – each recording over 100 cases (WHO 20/11/2024; AJ 23/10/2024). While surveillance data for the country is increasingly limited, continued challenges accessing safe water combined with above-average temperatures are likely to keep driving waterborne disease outbreaks in 2026.

In 2026, drought and water scarcity may also continue threatening social **cohesion and stability**, as such scarcity contributes to recurrent social unrest, including protests and localised disputes over land distribution, access to irrigation, and government regulation of agricultural practices such as limiting crop planting for both commercial and smallholder farms (KII 16/12/2025; ACLED accessed 15/12/2025; Shafak News 17/11/2025). Water scarcity has also historically fuelled tensions between rural communities, farmers, and oil companies,

as well as between tribal groups, with reports of illegal well drilling, trenching, and threats of violence during periods of acute shortage (CSIS 07/03/2025). In 2025, southern governorates experienced a sharp increase in water-related unrest, protests, and violence compared to 2024 and 2023, with Basra governorate emerging as a key area of concern (ACLED accessed 15/12/2025).

Table 1. Water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots between 2023–2025 by region¹



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 31/12/2025)

As drought continues to affect rural livelihoods, farmers and agricultural labourers are abandoning agriculture in favour of informal day and wage labour opportunities in urban areas. Since June 2018, the IOM has recorded over 186,000 people displaced by climate shocks in central and southern Iraq, mainly from Al Qādisiyyah, Dhi Qar, and Maysan governorates, with 63% displaced to urban settlements. While the majority of displacement occurred between 2022–2023 and declined significantly from 2024 as a result of increased rainfall, improved water management, and restrictions on water-intensive crops and activities, water scarcity continues to undermine IDP living conditions and limit returns to areas of origin (IOM 11/2025 and 15/07/2025). In 2026, **drought may continue to drive displacement** across southern Iraq, while the capacity of urban centres to accommodate new arrivals remains strained. Climate-displaced people are primarily engaged in low-skilled manual work (84%) and the

¹ The regions of Iraq have been divided using Iraq Panel (Iraq Panel accessed 23/01/2026). The Kurdistan autonomous region includes Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. North/central is made up of Diyala, Kirkuk, and Ninewa. Baghdad is treated as its own administrative unit because of its population size. The south is made up of Al Qādisiyyah, Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan, Muthanna, Najaf, and Wasit.

vast majority struggle to access livelihood and employment opportunities within urban host communities (IOM 15/07/2025). Displaced rural households also face heightened protection risks in urban settings, social marginalisation, discrimination, and housing insecurity (CSIS 07/03/2025; IOM DTM 15/07/2025).

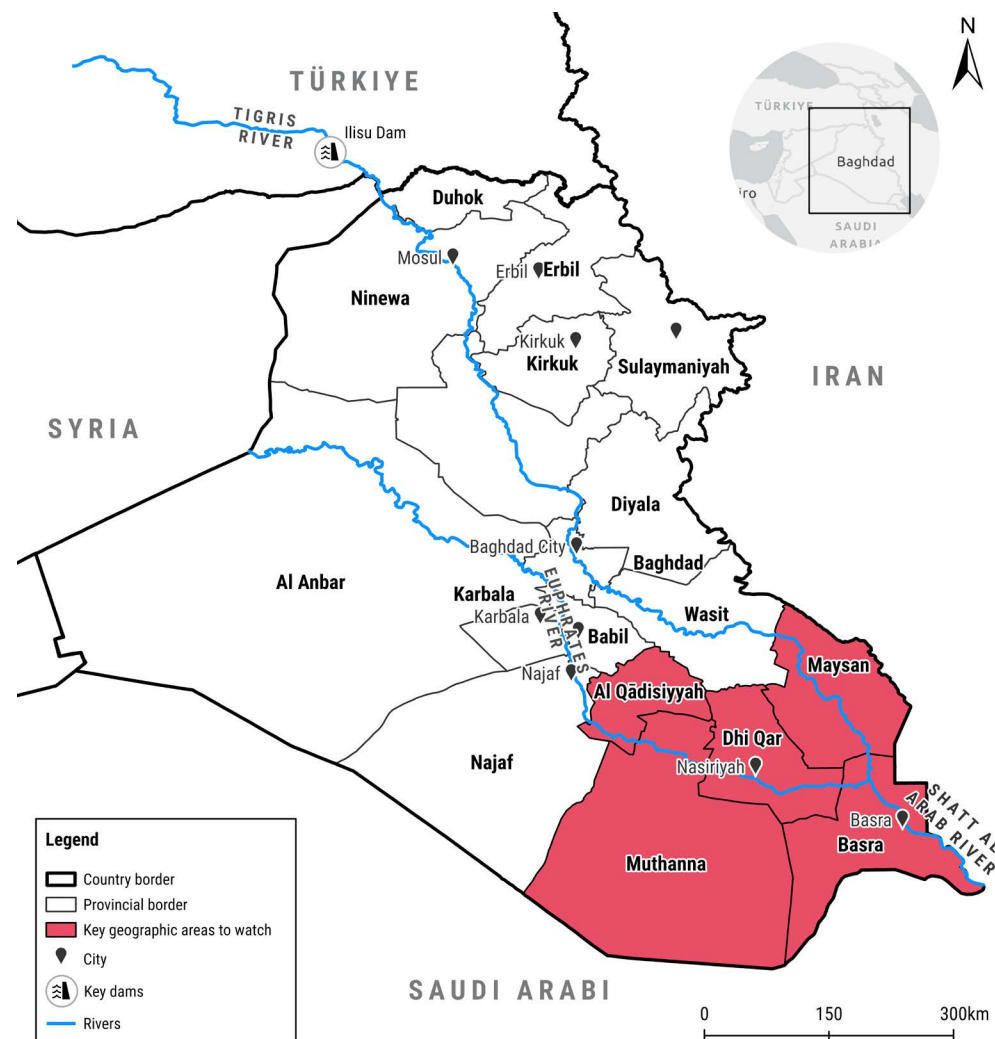
Geographic areas to watch

Early 2026 drought impacts on agriculture will likely hit hardest in southern Iraq's **Al Qādisiyyah, Dhi Qar, and Maysan governorates** (Mercy Corps accessed 09/01/2026). Al Qādisiyyah plays a key role in the production of staple crops, accounting for 33% of national rice production and 11% of barley production (USDA accessed 23/01/2026).

Southern governorates are also key origins for climate-induced displacement: **Dhi Qar** (46% of IDPs), **Maysan** (17%), and **Al Qādisiyyah** (12%) (IOM 11/2025). In 2026, these governorates are likely to remain hotspots for drought-induced displacement (IOM 15/07/2025).

Basra, Maysan, and Muthanna governorates are also at increasing risk of tensions and unrest driven by water scarcity. In 2025, ACLED recorded 106 protests, demonstrations, and riots in Basra governorate directly linked to water-related issues, the highest number recorded across Iraq. Maysan and Muthanna governorates recorded the next highest number of water-related events in 2025, with 22 each (ACLED accessed 15/12/2025). If current trends persist, water availability and quality are likely to remain key drivers of social unrest in 2026. Basra is strategically significant, generating more than 70% of Iraq's oil revenues and hosting the country's two deep-water ports (CSIS 07/03/2025).

Map 1. Geographic areas to watch in Iraq



Source: ACAPS



Preparedness and response capacities

National and regional authorities are taking measures to address water scarcity, including large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the water desalination plant in Basra, the Kurdistan autonomous region's Qushtapa drinking water project, the construction of a wastewater treatment facility for Erbil, the expansion of groundwater irrigation, and water negotiations with upstream neighbours (FAO 18/09/2025; Reuters 24/07/2025; Asharq Al-Awsat 05/11/2025; Kurdish Globe 27/10/2025; Kurdistan Regional Government 16/11/2025). Although these initiatives indicate efforts to improve water availability and quality, institutional investment in WASH remains insufficient, averaging below 1% of total expenditure between 2018–2021, far below the estimated 4% required to achieve universal access by 2030 (CSIS 07/03/2025). Short-term measures taken by the Government to reduce water extraction for agriculture, such as restrictions on crop planting, are aimed at preserving water for drinking and domestic consumption, but also affect rural livelihoods, particularly in rainfed and dam-dependent areas, driving protests (Arab News 04/10/2025). Overall, water and sanitation needs are largely unmet, with limited institutional capacity to scale up assistance, including anticipatory action. Despite a USD 1 billion emergency reserve, Iraq's domestic financial architecture remains unprepared to systematically deploy resources in anticipation of shocks, with the fund only deploying reactively (UNDRR 15/12/2025). Alongside this, international aid assistance remains severely constrained. In 2025, US foreign assistance to Iraq fell by approximately 93% compared to 2023 (TCF 08/12/2025). The majority of funding continues to be channelled through UN organisations (59% of funding in 2023) instead of international NGOs (31% of funding in 2023) and domestic NGOs (0.2% of funding in 2023) (KII 04/12/2025 b; ICVA 30/05/2025). International preparedness includes the WFP strengthening shock-responsive safety nets and early warning, the IOM integrating early warning for rapid onset disasters (including climate hazards), disaster risk management, and climate adaptation into community contingency planning, and the WHO supporting health sector climate resilience (WFP 04/12/2024; IOM 08/12/2025). Significant gaps persist in meeting integrated WASH, food, nutrition, and protection needs, however, particularly for displaced populations without civil documentation (KII 04/12/2025 b; FEWS NET 13/10/2025).

Jordan

Overview

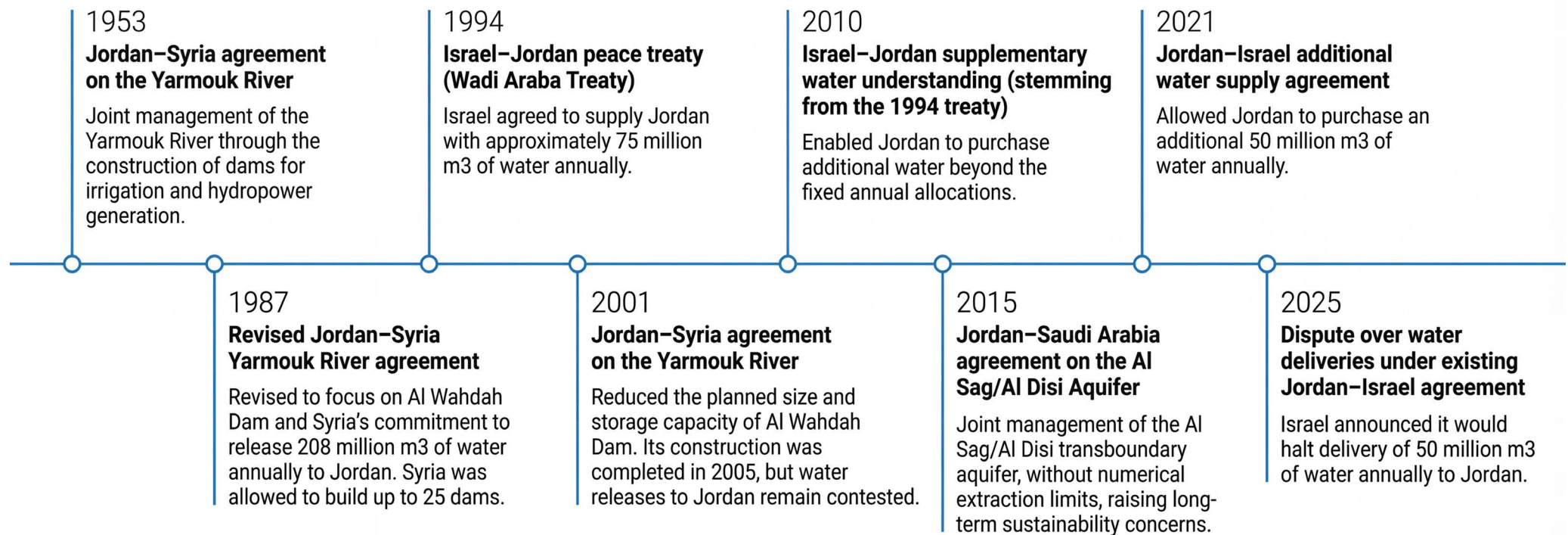
Jordan entered 2025 amid the second-worst drought in its 65-year history, following a 2024–2025 rainy season in which rainfall did not exceed 50% of the long-term average, contributing to water scarcity, reduced agricultural output, and slower economic growth (Jordan Times 12/10/2025; AJ 02/11/2025). Dam storage recorded a deficit of around 100 million cubic metres, with an estimated economic value exceeding JOD 140 million (USD 197 million) (Jordan Times 12/10/2025). Jordan is among the most water-scarce countries globally, with only 61m³ of renewable freshwater per capita per year, far below the absolute scarcity threshold of 500m³, and current demand exceeds available renewable resources by around 151 million cubic metres annually (WFP 27/03/2025; CSIS 07/03/2025). Climate change aggravates water scarcity already driven by a reliance on external piped water supplies from Israel, reduced Yarmouk River flows from Syria, population growth, refugee hosting, and longstanding domestic water mismanagement, including high network losses, groundwater overextraction, and inefficient irrigation practices. This scarcity increases disruptions to livelihoods, food security, and basic services (Maariv 08/12/2025; CSIS 07/03/2025; FAO et al. 26/06/2025). In 2026, the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Jordan is projected to include over 415,300 refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people and 1,276,700 host community members (UNHCR 22/12/2025).

Between 1953–2021, Jordan signed seven water agreements and treaties with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, indicating its dependence on neighbouring countries for its national water consumption. In December 2025, Israel announced it would not deliver around 50 million cubic metres of water stipulated under existing agreements originating from the 1994 treaty, citing technical and pricing issues related to desalination (Maariv 08/12/2025; Türkiye Today 09/12/2025).

Anticipated risks and humanitarian needs in 2026

Anticipated humanitarian needs in 2026 are likely to intensify if drought and erratic rainfall patterns observed in 2024 and 2025 persist. **Food security** and **livelihoods** are expected to be under continued pressure, given that total cereal production in 2025 was estimated at around 67,000mt, about 40% below average, as a result of rainfall 40% below the long-term average between November 2024 and March 2025 (FAO 05/12/2025). Dry conditions between October–November 2025 have already constrained the planting of 2026 winter cereals (mainly wheat and barley), signalling another potentially poor season (FAO 05/12/2025). Losses in rainfed agriculture and tree crops, such as fruits and olives, were notable in 2025, and substantial

Figure 1. Jordan's water treaties and agreements



Source: ACAPS using data from Climate Diplomacy (15/12/2022); Fanack (22/12/2025); Türkiye Today (09/12/2025); IWL (31/08/2015); Maariv (08/12/2025)

Note: the treaties and agreements shown represent legal frameworks, but actual 2025 deliveries fell short of allocated amounts in some cases (likely Syria and Israel) (Maariv 08/12/2025; CNN 08/07/2025).

financial losses were reported across farming systems (Jordan Times 12/10/2025). Given that 20–25% of households depend partly on farming, livestock, and food-related activities such as processing or distribution for their livelihoods, and 80% of food is imported, shocks to local or global production increase exposure to price volatility and livelihood erosion (Climate Diplomacy 15/12/2022; FAO 05/12/2025).

WASH-related needs are expected to rise further in 2026. In 2025, dam storage fell to around 16% and groundwater recharge was nearly zero, increasing reliance on groundwater extraction and raising salinisation risks (Jordan Times 12/10/2025; Maariv 08/12/2025). Dependence on politically sensitive water arrangements with Israel and reduced Yarmouk River flows from Syria add to supply uncertainty (CSIS 07/03/2025; Maariv 08/12/2025). Israel's December 2025 announcement that it was cutting Jordan's water supply by 50 million cubic metres may significantly decrease access to water for irrigation and domestic consumption, especially for the 2026 summer (June–September) (Maariv 08/12/2025; Türkiye Today 09/12/2025). **Health** risks are also likely to increase. Rising temperatures are associated with higher heat-related mortality and greater stress on public health systems, while water scarcity and unsafe coping practices – such as using untreated water or reducing hygiene – heighten exposure to waterborne diseases (Climate Diplomacy 15/12/2022; IOM 15/05/2025). In May 2025, Anjara city, in Ajloun governorate, recorded 344 cases of bacterial poisoning linked to the use of agricultural water sources for domestic supply, illustrating the potential health impacts of acute shortages (Roya News 10/05/2025).

Water supply shortages, coupled with unequal water distribution across the country, particularly between rural and urban areas, is likely to heighten **social tensions** in 2026, with households in parts of northern Jordan receiving piped water only once a month compared to weekly supply to households in Amman (CSIS 07/03/2025). Between 2023–2025, 17 water-related protests took place, with protesters demanding that the Jordanian Government cancel the 1994 peace treaty with Israel (Wadi Araba), as Israel continues to violate the terms (ACLEDA accessed 31/12/2025; AJ 16/10/2023; The New Arab 20/05/2021; Atlantic Council 10/10/2025).

Protection risks, potentially related to localised tension, conflict, or discrimination, may grow as resource stress aggravates existing tensions, including those related to rural-to-urban migration and the continued pressure of hosting large refugee populations, particularly from Syria, on strained urban services and social cohesion (IOM 15/05/2025).

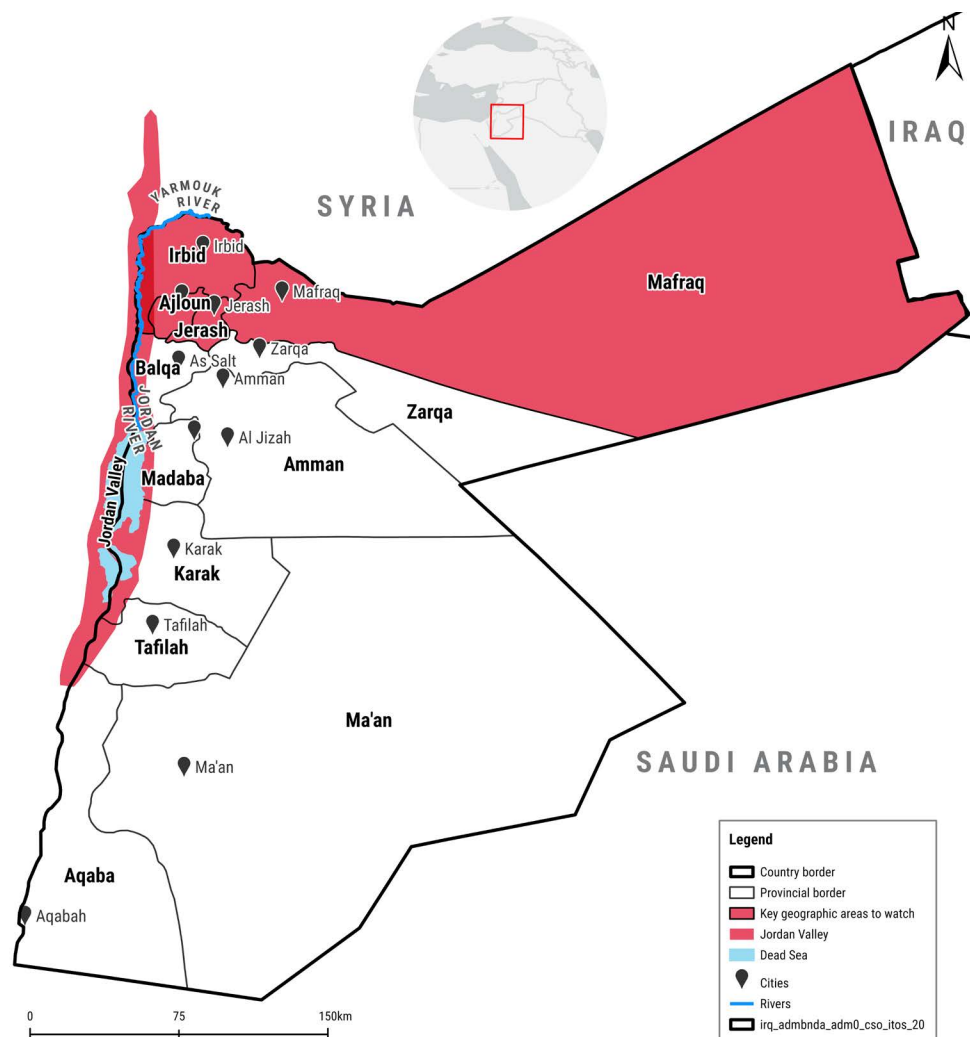
Geographic areas to watch

Key areas to watch in 2026 include northwestern governorates, particularly **Ajloun, Irbid, and Jerash**, where limited piped water provision, high population density, reliance on agriculture and tourism, and negative net migration, which is eroding the domestic workforce and economy, overlap with high climate vulnerability and challenging access to livelihoods and key services (IOM 15/05/2025; CSIS 07/03/2025). Despite abundant precipitation since December 2025, dam levels in Irbid and Ajloun remained extremely low by early January 2026, likely because preceding dry conditions reduced the capacity of catchments to generate effective surface runoff (Arabia Weather 05/01/2026). This indicates a risk of prolonged water scarcity in 2026.

Mafraq governorate is another area to monitor, as its dependence on rainfed agriculture, high exposure to drought, and large Syrian refugee population relative to its economic base are heightening pressure on water and food systems (IOM 15/05/2025).

The **Jordan Valley** – an agricultural corridor running along Jordan's western border, from the Yarmouk River in the north to the Dead Sea in the south and extending through the western parts of Balqa, Irbid, and Karak governorates – is a key area to watch in 2026 because it produces most of Jordan's agricultural outputs, as it benefits from a warm climate that supports fruit, vegetables, olives, legumes, and tomatoes, and depends heavily on freshwater from the Yarmouk River (Climate Diplomacy 15/12/2022; UNEP 16/12/2024). Despite heavy rainfall since the start of the current winter season and most dams reaching good storage levels, Al Wahdah (Unity) Dam on the Jordan–Syria border, with a capacity of around 115 million cubic metres, is nearing empty (Al Araby 17/01/2026). This is attributed to Syria's construction of over 30 dams, extensive well drilling in the Yarmouk Basin (in violation of the 1953 treaty), border coordination challenges, and the near absence of Jordanian tributaries feeding the Yarmouk River as a result of drought, leaving the Jordan Valley exposed to continued water scarcity (Husna 14/01/2026). Syrian violations of the water treaty intensified following the start of the conflict in 2011, but political relations between Jordan and Syria have improved since the fall of the Al Assad regime on 8 December 2024 and the appointment of the new Transitional Government, which may potentially improve water diplomacy (Jordan Times 03/02/2025; CNN 08/07/2025).

Map 2. Geographic areas to watch in Jordan



Source: ACAPS

Preparedness and response capacities

Institutional measures to address water scarcity are based on the 2023–2040 National Water Strategy and include integrated water management and major infrastructure projects, such as the Aqaba–Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance Project, which aims to desalinate seawater from the Red Sea in Aqaba and transport it to Amman and other governorates, likely Karak, Ma'an, Madaba, and Tafileh (WMI 27/07/2023; IFC accessed 22/01/2026). International aid assistance primarily focuses on building resilience and coping capacity instead of direct provision of emergency assistance to drought-affected communities. Programmes target rural and agricultural communities, including refugee-hosting areas, through interventions such as enabling access to water-efficient technologies, climate-adaptive agriculture, rainwater harvesting, and ecosystem restoration (UN 20/09/2025 and 26/01/2025; FAO 11/11/2025; IFRC 30/01/2025). These efforts are implemented alongside broader community-based climate adaptation initiatives such as awareness sessions, community capacity building to better manage existing water resources, improving water services and systems, and enhancing livelihoods and access to water in drought-prone governorates such as Karak, Ma'an, Madaba, and Tafileh (UN 26/01/2025; IFRC 30/01/2025). While these interventions strengthen long-term drought resilience, international relief assistance has been downscaled. As such, the Government is leading emergency response operations, including coordination of early warning systems through the National Centre for Security and Crisis Management. Early warning systems for drought, flash floods, and extreme weather conditions remain mostly non-operational and have weak coverage, however, likely because of fragmented institutional responsibilities and lack of funding, limiting capacity to scale up assistance to meet a sudden increase in unmet needs (Govt. of Jordan accessed 22/01/2026; WMI 27/07/2023; Roya News 20/01/2026).

Lebanon

Overview

Severe drought-like conditions have persisted since 2024, with very low precipitation between August–November and a 50% decline in rainfall between November 2024 and May 2025 compared to the November 2023 to May 2024 period (FEWS NET 02/12/2025; Mercy Corps 03/10/2025; AJ 02/07/2025). This has resulted in reservoirs reaching critically low levels (UNHCR 12/09/2025; Mercy Corps 03/10/2025). In 2025, Lake Qaraoun, the country’s largest reservoir, received only 13% of its usual annual inflows, undermining agriculture, hydropower generation, and public water supply systems (UNHCR 12/09/2025). Drought compounds Lebanon’s structural water scarcity drivers linked to unsustainable extraction for agriculture, aging water and sanitation infrastructure, and high transmission losses, which reach up to 50% within existing water networks as a result of leaks, pipe bursts, and illegal connections (IWMI 31/03/2022; KII 04/12/2025 b). More than 1.85 million people live in areas highly vulnerable to drought, while 44% of the population relies on unsafe water trucking for domestic use (UNHCR 12/09/2025). Such trucking lacks proper treatment and quality control, increasing the risk of waterborne disease, and is quite costly. By December 2025, water trucking costs had increased by up to 60% compared to levels prior to the 2024/2025 drought (FEWS NET 02/12/2025). Below-average rainfall and dry surface and groundwater sources reduced summer irrigation in 2025 and delayed winter planting, leading to below-average production, particularly in Bekaa and Baalbak-Hermel (FEWS NET 02/12/2025). For example, around 70% of potato farmers left their land unplanted in the Bekaa Valley because of unreliable irrigation (KII 18/12/2025; Arab News 23/09/2025). The 2025/2026 rainy season started with below-average precipitation in November and early December 2025. While rainfall in late December and January was average, total rainfall amounts were still below the seasonal average by mid-January, indicating that water reserves may not sufficiently replenish before the start of the dry season (Observe Lebanon X 17/01/2026).

Anticipated risks and humanitarian needs in 2026

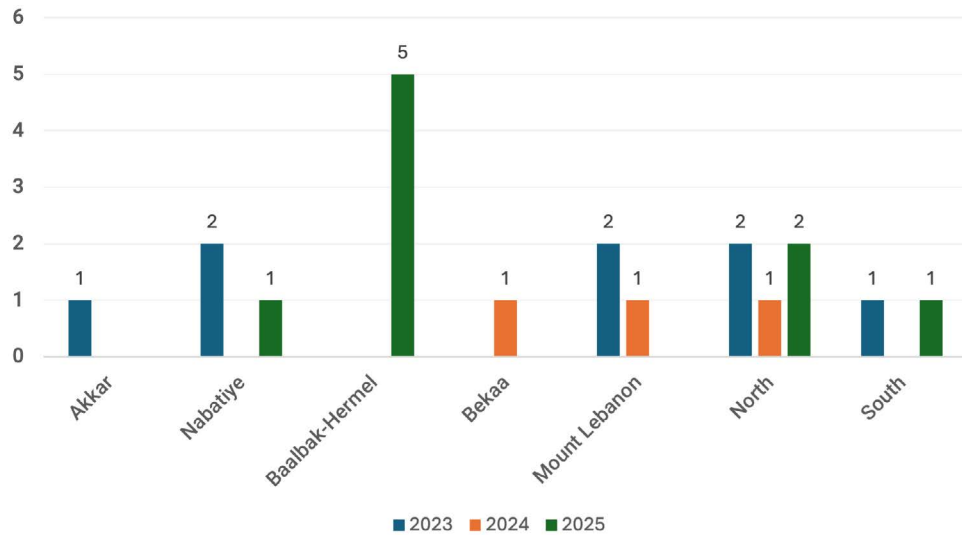
In 2026, water scarcity is likely to continue driving humanitarian needs across sectors, drawing on patterns observed in 2024 and 2025. Increasing use of unsafe water sources is likely to enhance the risk of **waterborne diseases**, including cholera, hepatitis A and B, typhoid, and rotavirus, with Lebanon remaining classified as cholera-prone since 2022 (UNHCR 15/08/2025; KII 17/12/2025). Overcrowded and informal settlements, where sanitation is poor and outbreaks have been localised but recurrent, are the areas most exposed to deterioration (UNHCR 03/07/2025; KII 17/12/2025). Such areas likely include refugees or displaced people settlements such as Akkar, Baalbak-Hermel, Bekaa, Nabatiye, North, and

South governorates (UNHCR 29/12/2025; IOM 16/10/2025). Low-income communities living in urban and peri-urban areas, where water trucking costs significantly increased in 2025, are also at high risk.

In 2026, low winter groundwater reserves and insufficient soil moisture resulting from above-average temperatures and insufficient rainfall may continue affecting **agriculture**, threatening both rainfed harvests and irrigated second-season crops such as vegetables and leafy greens (KII 18/12/2025). High food inflation, elevated to 23.9% year-on-year in September 2025, combined with flat incomes, is expected to continue constraining **food access**, potentially driving an increase in coping strategies with potential harmful effects, such as reduced meal frequency and quality (FEWS NET 02/12/2025). The most affected population group will likely be Syrian refugees who arrived post-December 2024, as 55% are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity between April–July 2026 (IPC 23/12/2025; WFP 19/01/2026). These refugees are considered the most affected population group because they recently arrived in Lebanon and have limited social networks and high humanitarian needs (IPC 23/12/2025).

Water scarcity is increasingly linked to **localised** tensions, disputes, and violence over access to wells and springs, with at least 50 water-related conflicts reported in 2025 and fatalities recorded in Baalbak-Hermel governorate (UNHCR 12/09/2025; Manachyr 03/07/2025; KII 18/12/2025). For example, on 3 July 2025, three people were killed in armed clashes over filling water tanks from an artesian well in Kfar Dabash town in Baalbak-Hermel (ACLED accessed 29/12/2025). While large-scale insecurity linked directly to drought is not anticipated in the short term, sustained agriculture livelihood losses across Lebanon and rising service gaps could heighten instability over time (KII 16/12/2025 a). ACLED’s data shows that water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots tripled between 2024–2025, with a notable increase in the number of events recorded in Baalbak-Hermel (ACLED accessed 29/12/2025).

Table 2. Water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots between 2023–2025 by governorate

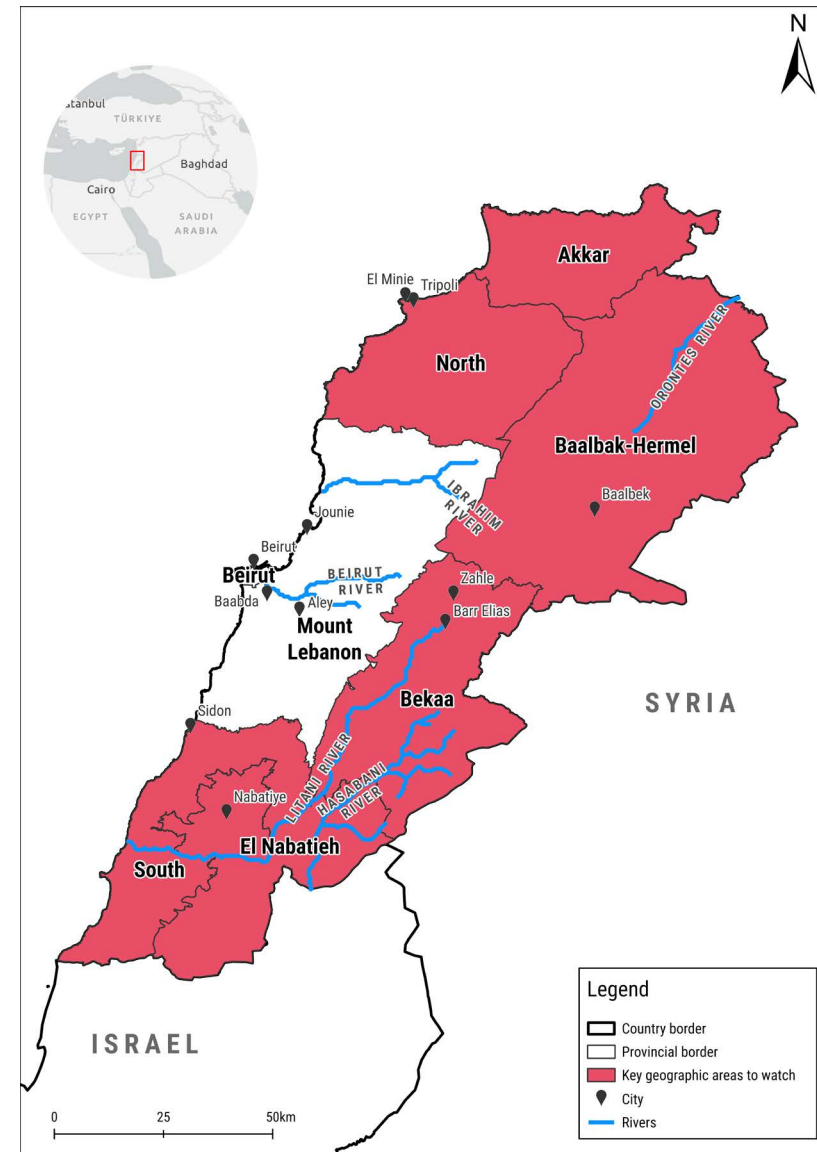


Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 31/12/2025)

Between October–November 2025, the UNDP conducted over 5,000 interviews in which nearly 55% of respondents agreed that climate-related issues have contributed to increasing conflicts and tensions, especially in areas with pre-existing social and political tensions (UNDP 12/2025).

Geographic areas to watch

Map 3. Geographic areas to watch in Lebanon



Source: ACAPS

Bekaa and **Baalbak-Hermel** are expected to remain the most affected areas, as around 25% of wells have already dried up, alongside depleted springs, water rationing, and severe disruptions to agriculture, including delayed and reduced planting, the diversion of irrigation canals to supply around 30,000 residents, and reports of protests and water-related violence (UNHCR 12/09/2025; FEWS NET 02/12/2025; Mercy Corps 03/10/2025). Disrupted or unequal access to water is likely to aggravate pre-existing sectarian tensions in Bekaa, given its mixed demographic composition, as the governorate hosts Lebanese Shia, Sunni, and Christian communities alongside Syrian refugees (UNHCR 19/03/2025).

In **North** and **Akkar**, rainfall declined by 37% in 2025, accelerating groundwater depletion and generating early signs of water-related tensions, such as localised clashes (UNHCR 12/09/2025). In 2026, pressures are likely to intensify in areas hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, particularly following new arrivals from Syria, who are mainly hosted in Akkar governorate. Drought impacts on livelihoods and water availability may intensify competition over scarce resources, heighten discriminatory narratives targeting the refugee population, and raise risks of inter- and intra-communal tensions or protests (UNHCR 24/09/2025; KII 16/12/2025; KII 17/12/2025).

In **South** and **Nabatiye** governorates, drought impacts are compounded by conflict-damaged irrigation networks and unexploded ordnance contamination following the conflict escalation with Israel and continued airstrikes since September 2024, restricting access to fields and irrigation, limiting winter planting, and placing municipalities under severe pressure amid demonstrations and community-led coping efforts (UNHCR 12/09/2025; FEWS NET 02/12/2025).

Preparedness and response capacities

Institutional drought risk management in Lebanon is challenged by limited coordination between government bodies responsible for water management, such as the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Ministry of Agriculture, which should work in concert, particularly to address unsustainable water extraction for agriculture. Such extraction has increased in recent years, with water-intensive crops such as avocado gradually replacing more sustainable and drought-resilient crops such as citrus (KII 18/12/2025). This is compounded by a lack of water infrastructure investment addressing the structural drivers of water scarcity, such as water losses resulting from old and damaged infrastructure, and limited recognition of drought by authorities, who see the issue as temporary, limiting preparedness, response, and long-term adaptation efforts (KII 16/12/2025; KII 18/12/2025). Institutional initiatives mainly focus on awareness raising, such as the national water-saving campaign launched by the Ministry of Energy and Water in mid-2025 to encourage efficient household and community water use (This is Beirut 18/07/2025). A three-year project launched in 2025 by the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the FAO also aims to support Lebanon's long-term development and recovery by building a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient water and

agri-food system alongside supporting seasonal agricultural workers with employment, preventing disputes over limited water resources and strengthening institutional capacity to deliver better services and governance (FAO 16/10/2025).

International aid assistance is constrained by the significant reduction in both development and humanitarian funding and coordination challenges, affecting preparedness, response, and adaptation efforts. Donors have recently prioritised direct assistance to the Government and fully transferred key programmes, such as the National Safety Net Programme, to national authorities, although it remains unclear whether they have the capacity to fully take over and absorb these responsibilities (KII 16/12/2025; KII 17/12/2025). Response frameworks exist, such as the Water Scarcity and Drought Response Plan launched in 2025, which indicates operational priorities including implementation of early warning systems, drought vulnerability mapping, monitoring of water sources, and public awareness campaigns. Funding gaps, damaged water infrastructure, and lack of a formal drought declaration system, likely as a result of political implications, challenge the effectiveness of the response, however (UNHCR 12/09/2025; Mercy Corps 25/11/2025).



Palestine (West Bank)

Overview

In 2025, the West Bank faced severe water stress, mainly driven by Israel's restrictions on water resources, but also aggravated by climate shocks. During the 2024–2025 rainy season, rainfall remained low and erratic, with only around 44% of average annual levels recorded in the West Bank and elevated temperatures contributing to increased evaporation, which reached up to 2,811mm in Jericho in 2024, for example, signalling sustained climatic stress into 2025 (PCBS 20/03/2025; Atmos 19/05/2025; ESSF 14/11/2025; Sawsana 20/03/2025). In 2025, Israeli authorities formally recognised climate impacts by declaring 2025 a drought year for Israel following poor rainfall and prolonged heat waves, highlighting that climatic stress affects areas in northern and southern Israel and the Jordan Valley (Al Araby 29/07/2025). Climate impacts compound structural and political constraints on Palestinian water access. Palestinians in the West Bank consume an average, including in 2025, of over 80L of water per person per day, compared with 200–300L among Israelis, reflecting persistent inequalities in allocation and supply (PCBS 25/06/2025; B'Tselem 05/2023; AA 26/07/2025). Israeli authorities have also seized more than 84% of the West Bank's water through diversion of water and destruction of WASH infrastructure (AA 26/07/2025; Oxfam 18/07/2024). Around 180 rural Palestinian communities continue to lack access to running water as a result of longstanding restrictions on well construction, infrastructure rehabilitation, and desalination by Israeli authorities. As temperatures increased during the summer of 2025, there were additional reductions in water supplied through Israeli pipelines in some areas, alongside demolitions of water infrastructure and settler-related violence, increasing insecurity and restricting access to water (CSIS 07/03/2025; AI 29/11/2017; OCHA 14/08/2025). In 2026, about 1.52 million people in the West Bank are projected to need humanitarian assistance amid escalating displacement and infrastructure damage (OCHA 16/12/2025). Recurrent heat waves in the spring and summer of 2025 further reduced water availability and affected rainfed agriculture, particularly olive production, which relies almost entirely on rainfall (ESSF 14/11/2025).

Anticipated risks and humanitarian needs in 2026

In 2026, climate stress is expected to further undermine **food security and livelihoods**, particularly in rainfed agriculture, which accounts for around 85% of farming in the West Bank (LSE accessed 29/12/2025). The 2025 olive harvest collapsed to less than a tenth, with an estimated 10,000mt, compared to the ten-year average of over 100,000mt, affecting around 100,000 Palestinian families who depend on olives for income at a time when access to labour markets in Israel remains restricted. The failed harvest was driven mainly by escalating access constraints linked to Israeli military restrictions and settler violence, which prevented farmers from reaching groves, irrigating trees during hot and dry months, and protecting

crops (ESSF 14/11/2025). Settler attacks also resulted in the destruction of more than 4,000 olive trees and saplings between 1–27 October alone, which is nearly triple the destruction recorded for the same period in 2024 (OCHA 30/10/2025). Heat waves and drought have also reduced grape and tomato quality, lowered yields, and accelerated land degradation, with farmers reporting that water stress and high temperatures have made some crops more susceptible to disease, caused uneven ripening, and reduced market value (NRC 20/12/2024; Climate School 26/10/2025). These trends suggest continued livelihood losses and heightened need for food and income support in 2026.

Water, sanitation, and health risks are likely to intensify. Reduced rainfall, rising temperatures, and increased evaporation compound continued restrictions to accessing water, leaving more than 90% of communities dependent on water trucking and rooftop storage (B'Tselem 05/2023; Sawsana 20/03/2025). In 2025, damage to wells and pipelines, supply cuts by Israeli authorities exceeding 50% in parts of Hebron, and reliance on unsafe alternatives increased WASH needs (OCHA 14/08/2025). These measures affected water access for at least 800,000 people, and is a situation that is likely to continue in 2026, raising risks of inadequate hygiene and water-related health impacts, aggravated by restrictive Israeli policies such as preventing Palestinians from harvesting either groundwater or rainwater (Atmos 19/05/2025).

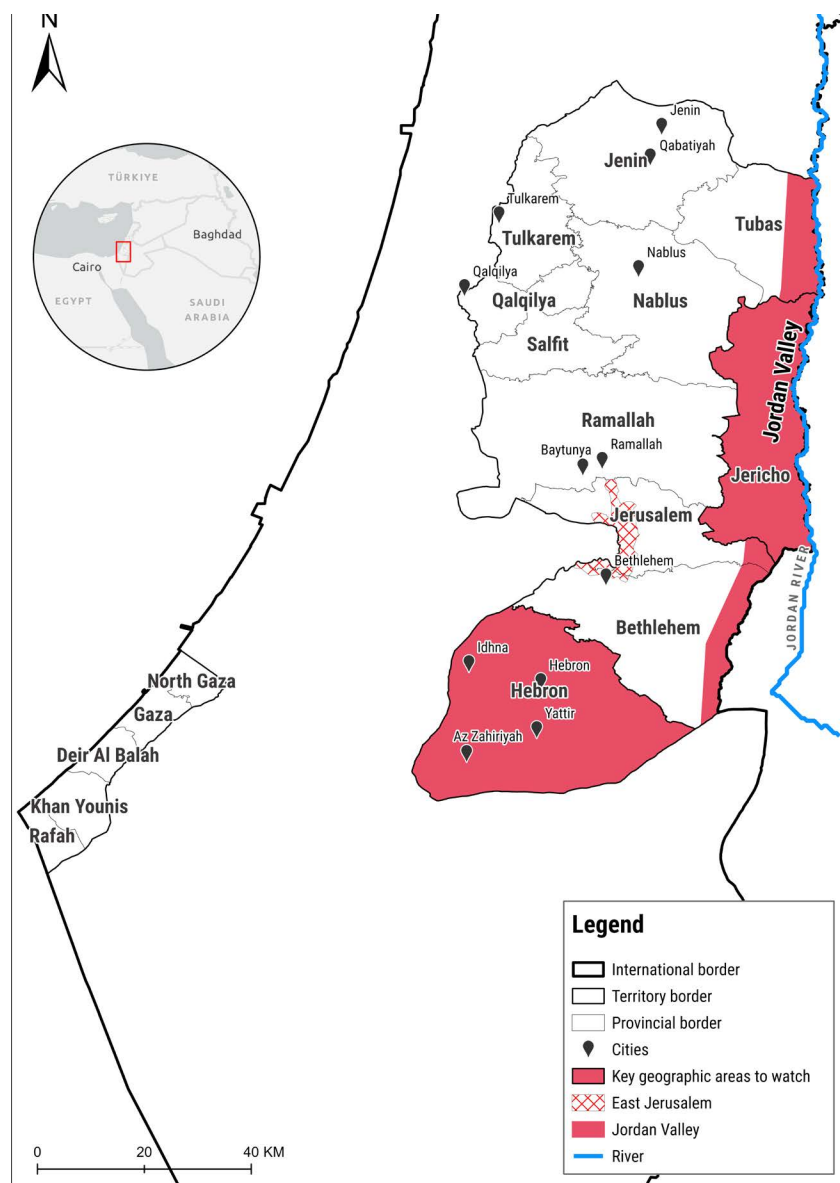
Protection and security risks are expected to remain high in 2026. In 2025, settler attacks on water infrastructure and agricultural land were widespread, with 62 recorded incidents targeting water systems in the first half of 2025 and over 1,300 settler attacks causing casualties, damage, or displacement by November (OCHA 14/05/2025 and 16/12/2025; Reuters 08/09/2025). Water scarcity combined with Israeli-imposed movement restrictions and fear of violence limit farmers' access to land and emergency irrigation, aggravating crop losses (ESSF 14/11/2025; NRC 20/12/2024).

Geographic areas to watch

Needs are likely to be particularly high in **southern West Bank governorates**, especially **Hebron**, where lower rainfall in 2024–2025 coincided with heatwaves and extensive WASH demolitions, including 42 structures destroyed between January–August 2025, deepening water access constraints (Sawsana 20/03/2025; OCHA 14/08/2025).

The **northern Jordan Valley** is another critical area, with **Jericho** recording only 54.8mm of rainfall in 2024, facing acute water shortages linked to heat stress, and 39 WASH demolitions between January–August 2025 (Sawsana 20/03/2025; OCHA 14/08/2025). Within this area, Al Auja town is particularly exposed, as its main spring dried up unusually early in 2025 as a result of a weak rainy season, limited groundwater recharge, and intrusions by Israeli authorities and settlers on water sources, severely affecting pastoral and agricultural livelihoods (Wafa 27/05/2025). Toward the end of 2025, settler attacks also increased in the Jordan Valley and are likely to continue throughout 2026, potentially resulting in more damage to water infrastructure and reduced access to water (AP 11/01/2026; MBN 21/01/2026).

Map 4. Geographic areas to watch in the West Bank, Palestine



Preparedness and response capacities

By 2025, preparedness and response capacities remained constrained despite institutional and international efforts. Palestinian institutions and civil society are pursuing climate adaptation measures, including improved water-use efficiency, climate-smart agriculture, and local research initiatives outlined in Palestine’s Nationally Determined Contributions – the official climate action commitments under the Paris Agreement – highlighting how the Palestinian Government plans to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change (UNFCCC 05/10/2021). Implementation is hindered, however, by occupation-related restrictions on access to land and water resources, alongside funding gaps (Climate School 26/10/2025; Arij 05/06/2024). Recent assessments in drought-affected governorates such as Jericho show limited early warning system coverage, uneven farmer awareness of water-saving irrigation, and rising irrigation and energy costs, indicating limited preparedness at the community level (Qassim 19/09/2025). International support and partnerships exist but are insufficient to overcoming structural access constraints and scaling up effective drought-resilience measures (Qassim 19/09/2025; Arij 05/06/2024). In response to settler demolitions of water infrastructure, humanitarian organisations have taken a series of interventions and measures, including water trucking, provision of mobile water tanks, and provision of maintenance and repair kits (OCHA 14/08/2025). This response is insufficient to addressing the scale of water and sanitation needs, however, which continue to be widespread (OCHA 14/08/2025; MSF 04/09/2025). On 30 December 2025, Israel banned 37 international NGOs from operating in Gaza and the West Bank, further restricting humanitarian access and aid delivery (OHCHR 15/01/2026).

Syria

Overview

Syria has experienced exceptional drought conditions since 2021 and one of the worst drought in decades in 2025, with rainfall dropping sharply nationwide (FEWS NET 31/12/2025; FAO 22/08/2022; KII 02/12/2025). Damascus received 29% of its annual average rainfall in 2025, compared to 86% of the average in 2024, while As-Sweida and Dar'a received less than half of 2024 levels (Fanack 06/08/2025). This drought is compounding longstanding humanitarian needs and posing additional challenges to reconstruction and transition efforts in a fragile context, following the fall of Al Assad (TWI 12/2025). OCHA estimates that 16.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria in 2026, with 8.6 million prioritised for urgent assistance (OCHA 08/12/2025). The country currently hosts approximately six million displaced people, with 2.5 million returning since December 2024 (comprising 1.79 million IDP returnees and 782,000 arrivals from abroad) (IOM 19/12/2025). During the civil war, two-thirds of Syria's water facilities were damaged or destroyed, with the WASH Cluster indicating that 13.6 million people (approximately 50%) lacked access to safe water and sanitation by the end of 2025 (Fanack 06/08/2025; UNICEF 11/2025). The agriculture sector is Syria's largest provider of rural livelihoods and its largest user of water, accounting for 87% of water use (Fanack 06/08/2025; FEWS NET 31/12/2025). Alongside reduced precipitation, the reduction of flow in the Euphrates caused by cross-border water management also strains agricultural, domestic, and industrial water supply. Türkiye controls up to 90% of the Euphrates's flow and has reduced releases well below levels stipulated in the 1987 interim agreement, the last made between the two countries, aggravating downstream shortages (CSIS 07/03/2025; Fanack 06/08/2025).

Anticipated risks and humanitarian needs in 2026

Water scarcity and drought will be key challenges to the Transitional Government's attempts to stabilise, centralise governance, and continue the reconstruction of infrastructure in 2026, driving humanitarian needs across the country and affecting health, food security, livelihoods, WASH, and protection (360 06/01/2025; Carnegie Endowment 20/11/2025).

14.6 million people are food insecure, including 9.1 million acutely **food insecure** and 1.4 million severely food insecure (FAO 02/12/2025). 70% of rural livelihoods are dependent on agriculture, and pressure is growing as a result of rainfall deficits, reduced river flows, and the destruction of irrigation systems (Ghazal 09/09/2025; CA-SYR 07/2025; Fanack 06/08/2025). The effects of conflict and drought on Syria's agricultural sector are affecting staple crops such as wheat and barley. In 2025, wheat production fell by more than 50% compared to the pre-war norms, while barley production was projected to be 65% lower than the average across the previous five years as a result of drought, extreme heat, insecurity, and high input costs

(FEWS NET 31/12/2025). The FAO anticipated that the 2025 wheat production deficit would affect at least 16.2 million people (GEOGLAM 10/2025; OCHA accessed 31/10/2025). Agricultural drought forecast models indicate that over 700,000 hectares of land in central and northern Syria are expected to be exposed to drought between January–March 2026, with Aleppo, Al Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, Hama, and Idlib governorates anticipated to be worst affected (Mercy Corps accessed 09/01/2026).

In 2026, drought and livelihood losses may also become key drivers of **displacement** within the country, and a challenge to return. In November 2025, 15,677 people were newly displaced within Syria, with the highest proportion being displaced from Idlib (33%) and As-Sweida (37%). Between February–November 2025, 80% of newly displaced communities reported that the economic situation was a key factor in their displacement, while 74% reported lack of livelihoods in their place of origin as one the main barriers to return (IOM 19/12/2025 and 15/12/2025). If drought conditions persist or worsen into 2026, internal displacement from severely affected areas may rise, particularly from drought-affected rural areas. This could generate new pressure points in host communities and aggravate social cohesion risks, especially where water access is politicised or unevenly distributed (CA-SYR 07/2025).

Deteriorating sanitation conditions caused by water scarcity have previously driven outbreaks of **waterborne diseases**. If current trends persist, 2026 may face elevated epidemic risks, including cholera (WHO 18/05/2025). Syria's last cholera outbreak was recorded in 2023 and culminated in over 111,000 confirmed cases and 104 deaths. The key areas affected, namely Idlib (32.9% of cases), Aleppo (26.2%), Deir-ez-Zor (18.6%), and Ar-Raqqa (17.8%), were the same areas affected by severe drought in 2021/2022 (IFRC 02/05/2025). While there was no confirmed cholera outbreak in 2025, outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea were reported in Deir-ez-Zor (Enab Baladi 04/08/2025).

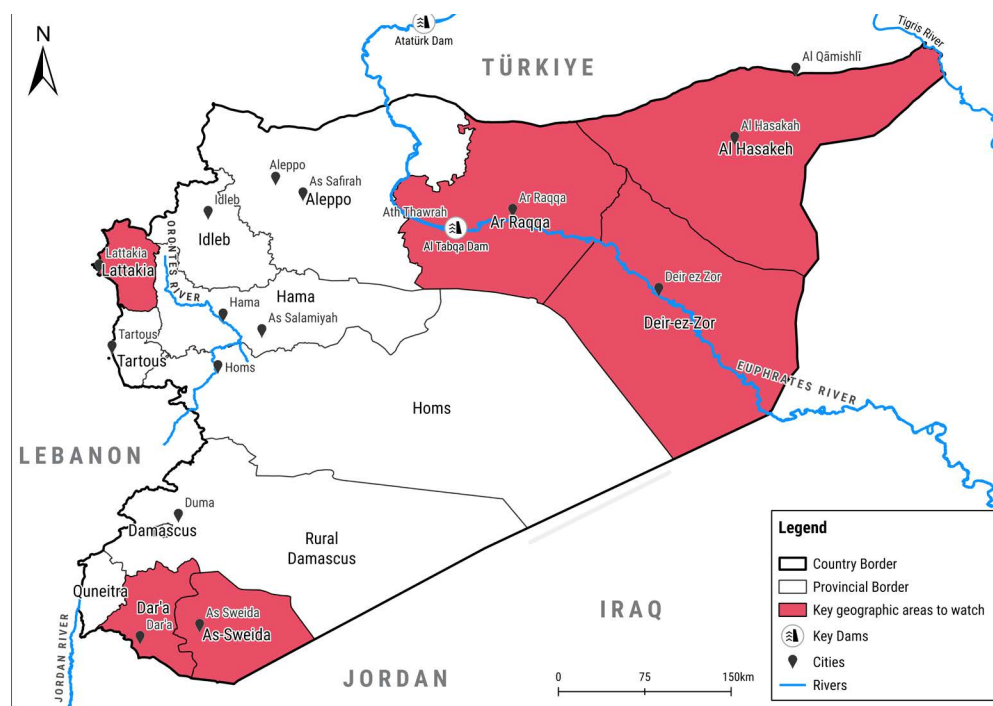
Geographic areas to watch

Northeast Syria, specifically **Al Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa, and Deir-ez-Zor** governorates, has been particularly affected by the decrease in rainfall. 70% of wheat production in the northeast is rainfed, compared to 50% nationally, with this rising to 85% in Al Hasakeh, causing drought to severely damage farm yields and livelihoods (CSIS 07/03/2025). Drought shocks, along with conflict-related displacement and repeated interruptions to Alouk station, the main source of safe water for nearly one million people in Al Hasakeh city and its surrounding areas, have left only 37% of households with sufficient access to water to meet basic hygiene and domestic needs (MSF 06/11/2025). According to ACLED data, the northeast also saw the highest number of water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots over the past three years (ACLED accessed 29/12/2025).

In **Latakia** governorate, drought contributed to forest fires in July 2025, aggravating a displacement crisis initially caused by cycles of sectarian violence (OCHA 13/07/2025; HRW 23/09/2025). Over 1,150 people were displaced and more than 14,000 affected. The fires also affected local water pumping stations, impeding access for 10,000 people in the area (OCHA 13/07/2025).

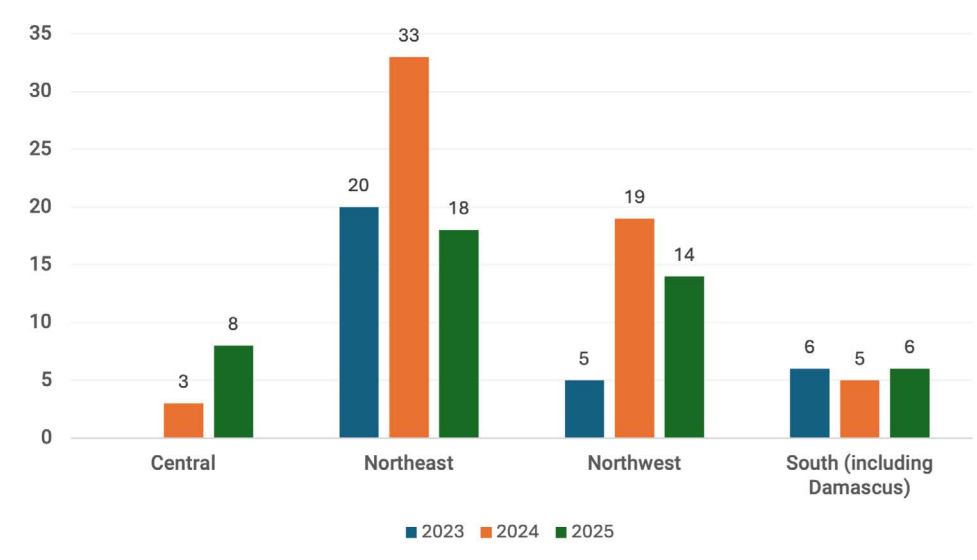
In **Dar'a** and **As-Sweida** governorates in **southern Syria**, water sources have deteriorated or dried up, affecting community livelihoods (Carnegie Endowment 20/11/2025; Syria Direct 18/06/2025). Continued deterioration in this region, along with sectarian tensions involving Druze communities in As-Sweida and continued Israeli incursions around key water systems, such as the Mantara Dam, may cause further security ruptures, leading to displacement and increased humanitarian needs (UNHCR 09/09/2025; SNHR 08/07/2025).

Map 5. Geographic areas to watch in Syria



Source: ACAPS

Table 3. Water-related protests, demonstrations, and riots in Syria by region



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 07/01/2026)

Preparedness and response capacities

Following Syria's civil war, a fragmented governance landscape emerged, with Damascus moving to centralise power in late 2025 and early 2026. As a result, institutional capacity to address the structural drivers of drought – such as unsustainable water extraction to cultivate water-intensive crops (e.g. cotton and tobacco) and a weak and damaged water network – remains very limited (KII 02/12/2025; KII 16/12/2025; TCF 16/06/2025). Previously, much of the preparedness and response had been led by national and international NGOs, but the decline in humanitarian funding since 2024 (including contingency funding) has significantly eroded coordination, preparedness, and response capacities (KII 15/12/2025). Even prior to the reduction in funding, the coordination of water management initiatives was limited and challenged by data scarcity, with multiple stakeholders supporting water infrastructure projects without sufficient data to make informed decisions (CSIS 07/03/2025; Syrian Observer 07/08/2025). Some resilience-oriented initiatives exist, including drought-resistant seed distribution and the promotion of climate-smart agriculture in the northwest, but coverage remains insufficient relative to needs without central government coordination and investment (FAO 19/03/2025; SPARC/Violet Organization 31/10/2025). Overall, preparedness and response capacities are inadequate to manage a prolonged drought extending into 2026 (TCF 16/06/2025).