



Not one Region. Not one Risk.

**Assessing the human rights risks and
impacts in light of the current
circumstances in the Middle East**



The illusion of continuity

As conflict escalates in Iran and across neighbouring parts of West Asia, the immediate priority remains the protection of civilian life and the growing human cost of the crisis. Yet for businesses operating in or connected to the region, the situation cannot be understood only as a security or logistics issue. While some operations may continue to function and certain markets may appear stable from a distance, these surface indicators can mask a far more fragile reality on the ground. Across the wider region, including the Gulf states, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel, the effects of instability are being felt unevenly, with implications for workers, communities, supply chains, service delivery, and business continuity.

What may appear to be resilience is often being sustained by people and systems already under pressure, particularly those with the least protection and the fewest alternatives. In this context, companies should resist framing the current moment as temporary disruption alone and instead assess how heightened conflict may deepen existing vulnerabilities, create new risks, and increase the human consequences of business decisions across their operations and value chains.

1. Reflect on your own context — Questions to ask yourself

We know the impacts of this war are not felt evenly. They vary significantly depending on the sector, the nature of operations, workforce exposure, and supply-chain dependencies. For some, the effects may be immediate and visible. For others, they may be slower moving but no less important.

These are not questions for a compliance file. They are questions a leadership team should be able to answer right now, clearly, honestly, and with specifics.

- *How is the current situation affecting your people, directly or indirectly?*
- *Which workers, functions, or suppliers may be most exposed at this stage?*
- *Are your current contingency measures sufficiently people-centered?*
- *What communication, support, or governance gaps are beginning to emerge?*



At times like this, safety must remain the primary concern. Economic efficiency is only sustainable where it is underpinned by adequate governance, clear communication, and meaningful support for people across operations and supply chains.

2. What you are still responsible for?

Conflict does not suspend business responsibility. It raises the stakes for it.

Your responsibility does not stop at your payroll boundary. If you benefit from the work of contracted, subcontracted, or outsourced workers, their welfare during this crisis is part of your risk exposure and part of your obligation.

Workers across the region are absorbing costs right now that businesses need to see, name, and act on: wage anxiety, information blackouts, psychosocial distress, unsafe working conditions, and the compounding pressure of recruitment debt in a conflict economy. These are not abstract risks. They are documented, foreseeable, and attributable.

The real test is not whether operations are still running. It is whether businesses understand where risk is already landing and on whom.



Recommended Actions* to be tailored in light of the context, country and type of business operations

Immediate — Next 30 Days

- **Issue a verified, multilingual workforce communication** covering the current situation, official safety guidance for your country of operation, and how your company is responding. This must reach every worker — directly employed and contracted — in the languages they actually speak. An English-only email to the HR distribution list is not a communication.
- **Conduct a rapid people-risk mapping** across your operations. Identify which workers, sites, and suppliers are most exposed — physically, economically, and informationally. Prioritise action on the highest-exposure groups: outdoor workers, mobile workers, workers in employer-controlled accommodation, workers carrying recruitment debt and other vulnerable categories such as staff that may require urgent medical attention.
- **Confirm wage continuity through compliant channels** Verify that WPS or salary oversight obligations are being met across all jurisdictions where you operate. Require contractors to provide a wage assurance confirmation, proof of timely payment through compliant systems.
- **Implement a documented stop-work and shelter protocol** that applies to every worker on your sites and routes — including contracted and outsourced staff. This must include mapped shelter points, supervisor authority to halt work without sign-off delays, and transport controls for mobile workers mid-route during alerts.
- **Activate or establish a confidential reporting channel** for workers to raise safety concerns, report coercion, or request support. This channel must be multilingual, accessible to contracted workers, and protected from retaliation. A complaints process that only works for payroll staff in English is not a safeguard.
- **Monitor and coordinate proactively with worker-sending country embassies** to support timely communication, understand emerging consular concerns, and strengthen preparedness for potential worker protection, evacuation, or documentation needs.



The responsible choice

Business resilience, economic performance, company culture, and above all governance are being tested in real time.

Periods of instability reveal far more about a company than any policy, pledge, or ESG disclosure ever can. **A business's real human rights record is defined by how it behaves when people are exposed to fear, disruption, and uncertainty, not by what is written in a document during calmer times.**

Across the region, workers, suppliers, communities, regulators, embassies, investors, and clients are watching closely. They will remember which companies took practical steps to protect people, communicate clearly, and act responsibly across their operations and value chains and which chose to take easy shortcuts.

About BHRMENA

BHRMENA is **the only organization solely** dedicated to advancing business and human rights practices across the Arab States.

Regional legal experience BHRMENA is an independent regional firm with strong legal and regulatory expertise across the Arab States. Its neutral positioning allows it to convene businesses, suppliers, and stakeholders in a trusted setting for open and practical dialogue.

Extensive experience with international standards BHRMENA has extensive experience working with global frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles, OECD Guidelines, and ILO standards, and is well positioned to translate these expectations into practical approaches suited to the Arab States' regulatory and business environment.

Operational understanding of supply chains BHRMENA's work is grounded in the operational realities companies face in the region, including procurement pressures, subcontracting models, labour supply dynamics, and day-to-day implementation challenges.

