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Duty of care: Workforce support in conflict regions

How organizations protect, support, and manage employees in dangerous places



Foreword

The number of active armed conflicts sits at its highest level since the Second World War[1], and a growing share of them fall in places where global employers have people on the ground. For these companies, getting people to safety is the core obligation, but it is increasingly not the only one. The competition for skilled talent has sharpened, and how a company stands behind its workforce in hard moments now shapes its ability to attract and keep good people.

In the months immediately following the outbreak of the war in the Middle East, we asked 45 large employers how they support employees through the conflict. Our goal was to understand how companies are managing their workforces in the Middle East and to share peer-to-peer benchmarking reports. We found that their programs are generally strong on the operational basics. They are less consistent on the financial, communication, tax, and legal groundwork that a sustained presence in conflict regions calls for.

The companies setting the pace prepare for the next crisis before it arrives. Our 2026 Workforce Support in Conflict Regions survey shows where your peers have built that readiness, where the common gaps lie, and what sets the strongest programs apart. We hope it helps you protect and support your own employees.

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1 "UCDP registered 65 conflicts in which states were involved on one or both sides during 2025, which is also the highest number since statistics began to be recorded in 1946." Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University

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Key findings



A solid core with gaps in groundwork

One pattern holds across the four themes this study revealed: Companies have built the apparatus to respond when a crisis hits, but much less of the financial, communication, tax, and legal framework that must be in place beforehand.

01 **Operational readiness is strong:**

Most companies keep a crisis management team (73%), offer remote work (78%), and maintain full benefits during an evacuation (87%)

02 **Financial support is split, and shallow where it exists:**

Just over half offer evacuation assistance (51%), but most provide no hardship allowance (70%) or danger pay (83%)

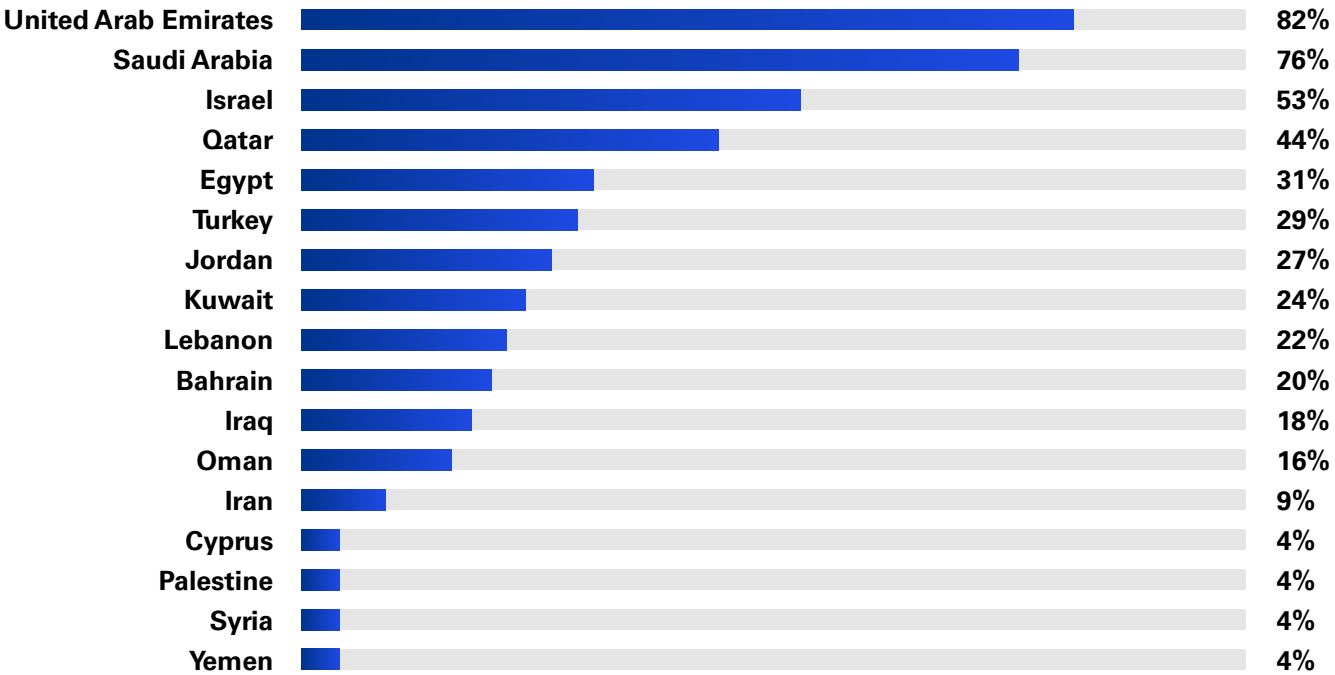
03 **Communication is mostly reactive:**

Most companies reach employees only as needed (62%), and nearly all rely on email (91%)

04 **Policy and tax get the least attention**:

Only 11% work from a formal evacuation policy, a third have told employees nothing about cross-border tax exposure (33%), and just 7% have given a comprehensive briefing

Country-wise distribution of impacted employees (in percent)



Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26

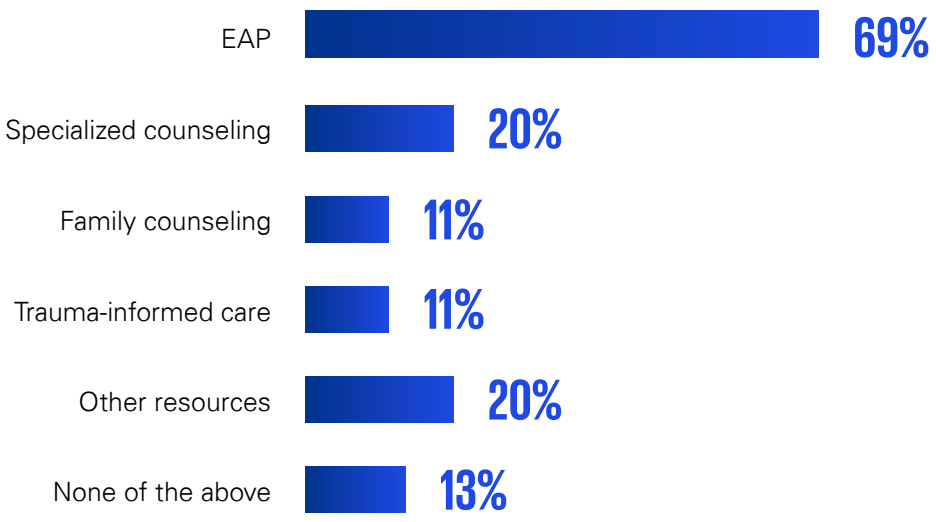
Most companies have built the basics

Companies generally handle the tactical side of crisis response well. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the employers we surveyed keep a dedicated crisis management team, and another 4% are building one. About the same share (76%) track where their employees are and whether they are safe. Benefits stay intact when a company helps an employee evacuate: 87% maintain full health insurance and retirement contributions throughout. Remote work is the single most common form of support, offered by 78%, and 69% provide an employee assistance program (EAP) for mental health. Security briefings (58%) and an emergency hotline (56%) round out a credible baseline.

Beyond that baseline, the depth varies, and the same pattern recurs through the rest of the survey. Employee tracking is mostly manual, with 58% relying on check-ins against the 18% using dedicated software. Physical security tends to stop at briefings and a hotline; secure transport (29%) and on-the-ground security consultants (27%) are far less common. For mental health, few companies go past an EAP, leaving specialized counseling (20%), trauma-informed care (11%), and family counseling (11%) uncommon. Flexible hours (36%) and extended leave (27%) trail well behind remote work.

For most companies, the core response is solid. What gets built around it is where programs part ways.

Mental health & wellbeing resources



Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26



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Financial support is split and often shallow

Whether a company offers financial help for employees to evacuate is split down the middle: 51% do, and 49% do not. Among those that do, the help concentrates on immediate needs. Most cover travel costs (83%) and many fund temporary housing (48%). Emergency cash advances, shipping household goods, and replacing communication equipment are rarer, each offered by 17%.

Only 22% of the companies that offer evacuation assistance provide a formal relocation allowance, split among a percentage of salary (40%), a lump sum (20%), and other methods (40%). Where they send people depends on the employee's situation more than the cost. Just over half (52%) return to their home country, 13% go on to a third country, and for the remaining 35% the destinations vary, depending on the case. Immigration eligibility and the right to work (87%), safety (70%), and family or cultural ties (61%) weigh most heavily, with tax considerations and an existing company office each cited by 43%. Cost ranks near the bottom at 22%.

Despite employees operating in active conflict environments, 70% of companies provide no hardship allowance and 83% provide no danger pay. Among the minority that do, the amounts are meaningful, often (67% of the time) amounting to more than 20% of base salary. In most cases (75%), danger pay is structured as a share of base salary, with the other 25% reflecting a fixed daily or monthly amount. It is generally triggered by government advisories, a company's own security assessment, or automatic rules in designated zones.

A related opportunity goes mostly unused. Section 139 lets US employers make tax-free disaster relief payments to employees[2], a benefit for both sides, yet just 17% of US-headquartered companies that offer assistance take advantage of this section.

Hardship allowance (percent of companies offering assistance)



Danger pay (percent of companies offering assistance, n=23)



Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26

2 United States Code, 2018 Edition, Supplement 3, Title 26 – Internal revenue Code, Section 139 Disaster relief payments

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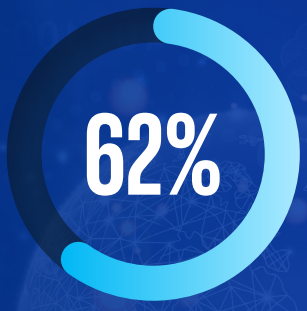
Communication mostly waits for events



Email is the workhorse for crisis communications, used by 91% of companies, with a manager cascade as the main backup (56%). Town halls (38%), text messages (29%), and dedicated apps (18%) play smaller parts. Most companies (62%) reach out only as needed, with 22% updating employees weekly, 11% daily, and 4% not at all.

That reactive cadence, paired with dependence on a potentially fragile channel, can leave people waiting for news in a fast-moving situation.

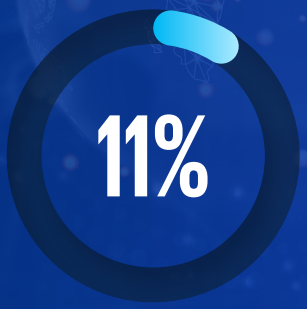
Update frequency



As needed



Weekly



Daily



Not at all

Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26

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Policy and tax lag furthest behind

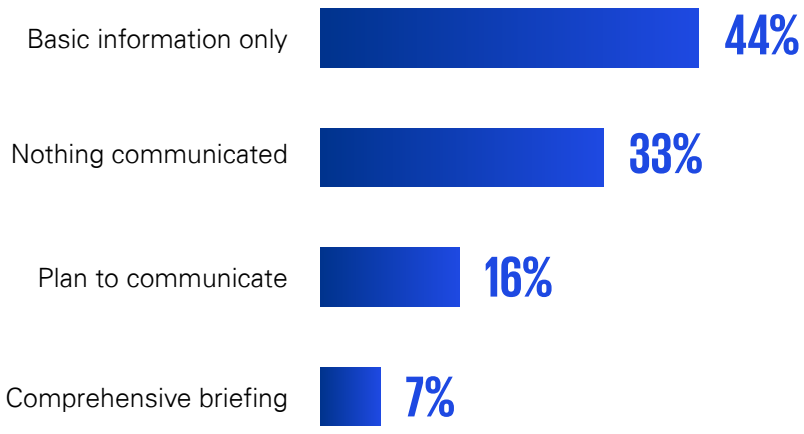
As programs move from response logistics to advance planning, they thin out. Few companies, just 11%, handle evacuation through a formal emergency evacuation policy. Most lean on a "work away from home" arrangement (31%), improvise case by case (29%), or operate with no defined policy at all (22%). A handful fall back on force majeure or secondment provisions (4% and 2%). For multinationals of this size, that is a lot of improvisation around decisions with serious legal and financial risk.

Following an evacuation, most companies (80%) keep employees on home-country payroll, and 64% limit what those employees do to manage permanent establishment risk—the chance that an employee's work creates a taxable corporate presence in another country. Among companies with a "work away from home" policy, 43% cap it at 30 days. These are sound reflexes, and they show that companies take their own tax exposure seriously.

Employees get less of that care, however. A third of companies (33%) have told their people nothing about the personal tax consequences of working across borders, and only 7% have provided a comprehensive briefing; 44% have shared basic information, and 16% plan to address it later. So, a company will work hard to move an employee to safety, then leave that same person to work out the tax consequences of the move alone—creating significant compliance and reputational risks.

Policy and tax sit at the hard end of the program for a reason: a company can arrange a flight under pressure, but a tax position, a payroll structure, and a written policy must be in place before a crisis forces the question.

Tax, payroll & compliance: tax implications communicated to employees



Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26



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The bar is rising



Operational readiness gets most companies through the first hours of a crisis, but the strongest programs integrate these tactical approaches within a larger strategic plan. They do three things consistently: They prepare a formal policy framework ahead of any crisis, keep employees informed on a regular schedule, and protect them financially across the whole arc of an emergency, from evacuation through hardship and danger pay.

Our survey revealed that this combination is still rare. The companies that manage it prove the higher standard is reachable now, and as the competition for skilled talent sharpens, it is becoming what employees expect. The bar for supporting a workforce in conflict regions is rising, and the question for any company with people in harm's way is whether its program has risen with it.

At KPMG LLP (KPMG), we help organizations build that structure: the policy framework, the communication plan, and the payroll, tax and legal groundwork supporting it all.

Insights into action

- Put an evacuation and crisis policy in writing before the next crisis
- Set a regular communication cadence and add a reliable channel beyond email
- Decide your position on hardship and danger pay in advance, and benchmark the amounts against peers
- Brief employees on their cross-border personal tax exposure ahead of any move
- For US employers, check whether tax-free disaster relief payments under IRC Section 139 fit your program

01 Formalize

Build a policy framework before the next crisis.

02 Communicate

Proactive, regular updates — not just as-needed

03 Protect

Layer financial support from evacuation through Danger Pay

FY26 Benchmarking Study | n=45 companies | kpmg.com

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Survey methodology

Survey methodology: In April and May 2026, KPMG surveyed 45 large employers with operations across the Middle East about how they support employees through conflict and crisis. The survey took place in the context of the war in the Middle East, which started in February 2026. Respondents are predominantly US-headquartered (71%) multinationals, two-thirds with global workforces above 10,000, and most with a decade or more of operations in the affected region. Figures reflect all 45 respondents except where noted. Several findings on financial support, relocation, and hazard pay are based on the 23 companies that offer evacuation assistance, and a few subfindings rest on small groups within that base and should be read as directional.

Who responded? 45 Large employers — Predominantly US-headquartered

45

Total respondents
n=45 complete responses

71%

US-headquartered
32 of 45 respondents

67%

10,000+ global workforce
30 of 45 respondents

31%

1,000+ employees in affected region
14 of 45 respondents

73%

10+ years operating in affected region
33 of 45 respondents

Source: KPMG LLP, Workforce Support in Conflict Regions Survey, 05/22/26

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If you need support KPMG is here to help

KPMG Global Mobility Services works with organizations to streamline cross-border complexities for a globally mobile workforce. Our teams can help you:

- Turn an ad hoc crisis response into a managed program
- Build and document evacuation, work-away-from-home, and broader mobility policies before they are needed
- Structure cross-border payroll and manage permanent establishment risk as employees move
- Address employees' personal cross-border tax exposure, including relief available to US employers after a disaster
- Plan duty-of-care communications and benchmark your program against peers

To learn more about how KPMG Global Mobility Services can help you strengthen your workforce support in conflict regions, contact our professionals.

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