

SITUATION UPDATE: IRAN APRIL 2026

Ten Issues Reshaping the Humanitarian Landscape

By Will Evans, Policy Analyst

Over one month into the conflict, a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis is emerging in Iran and the surrounding region. The Iran war that began on February 28, 2026, has created the largest energy supply disruption in modern history, which is having cascading humanitarian impacts far beyond the Middle East. Our most recent reporting covers a wide range of intersecting issues that impact the rights and needs of displaced populations across the region.

When USCRI first [reported](#) on the war in early March, the crisis was still in its first weeks, and the impacts were unclear. At the time, we identified three dynamics that warranted close attention: the potential for large-scale displacement, the disproportionate harm to children, and the risk of [double displacement](#) for populations. We also noted the collapse of key protection pathways and drew on lessons from the Iraq War (2003-2011) to remind policymakers that destabilizing a country or region will often lead to forced migration.

The conflict has only deepened across each of the three dynamics, and exposed crises many did not fully anticipate. In this situation update, USCRI expands our watchlist to ten issues that are reshaping the humanitarian landscape across the Middle East and beyond. The issues fall into four main categories: **Displacement and Protection, Violations of International Law, Global Cascading Effects, and the Collapse of the Humanitarian Response.**

The most important action now is to deescalate the conflict before it spirals further out of control. Beyond that, the quickest path towards stability is helping to fund the humanitarian response, which will shift our engagement to addressing the needs of the region.

Displacement and Protection

1. **Displacement in Iran exceeds 3 million** – On March 12, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shared a preliminary [assessment](#) that up to 3.2 million people had been internally displaced in Iran. Since then, this figure has not been updated. The Norwegian Refugee Council's Secretary General Jan Egeland recently [underscored](#) how Iran's civilian population is exhausted and traumatized, and that millions have fled in search of safety. While reporting during conflict is always challenging, it is essential that the international community support entities working to document displacement and humanitarian needs so that an accurate understanding of those needs can be obtained.

Across the region, countries already host [24.3](#) million forcibly displaced people. These are populations who faced significant protection risks even before the war. Over one million people have been displaced inside Lebanon, with Palestinian refugees facing an acute vulnerability as several refugee camps in Southern Lebanon fell within the area of new evacuation orders from Israel. Around [189,000](#) individuals – the majority Syrian nationals, alongside Lebanese citizens - have now crossed into Syria to avoid airstrikes. [Afghans](#) face a unique crisis, where over the last year newly 2 million had been pressured by Iranian authorities to return to Afghanistan. This mass [deportation](#) effort now collides with an expanding conflict, destabilizing one of the world's largest refugee-hosting countries.

2. **Lebanon's war within a war** – Compounding crises in Lebanon are getting less attention but is no less deserving of attention. A severe humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding, with the Ministry of Public Health reporting over 1,142 killed and 3,315 injured since March 2. Nearly twenty percent of Lebanon's population has had to relocate, with 136,262 internally displaced people in over 600 shelters, many of which are converted schools.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) has reported that well over 300,000 individuals have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, the majority of whom are Syrian nationals. Palestinian refugees also face acute vulnerabilities, with various camps in southern Lebanon being forced to flee. Both populations are now experiencing double displacement, having been uprooted multiple times.

3. **The alarming impact on children** – Over [1.2 million children](#) have been displaced across the region. [Displaced children](#) in the Middle East are facing heightened vulnerability to violence and exploitation, losing access to critical services, access to education, and suffering significant trauma impacting both their physical and mental health.

As of this writing, an estimated 340 children have been killed since the conflict began: in Iran, Lebanon, as well as Israel and Kuwait, with over 2,000 children injured according to the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)). In Iran specifically, 481 schools have been damaged across Iran, with [universities](#) coming under attack in recent days.

The United Nations human rights chief, Volker Türk, has called on the United States to conclude its investigation into the attack on the Shajareh Tayyebbeh Girls' School in Minab on February 28, 2026. Outlets including CNN, BBC Verify, the New York Times and Amnesty International have concluded that the U.S. bears responsibility based on the evidence.

One of the most alarming developments emerged on March 26, when the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced that children, as young as 12 years old, can now volunteer to become “homeland defending combatants” [according](#) to Human Rights Watch. The recruitment of children is a [grave violation](#) under international law. The Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits such recruitment of children under the age of 15, and its Optional Protocol raises the age to 18 years. As UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Vanessa Frazier, [said](#), “Children always pay the highest price in wars they did not choose.”

4. **Religious minorities** – Iran is a diverse, and multi-ethnic nation, with a variety of religious and ethnic minorities. In their 2026 annual report, the United States Commission on International Religious freedom (USCIRF) again recommended that Iran be redesignated a Country of Particular Concern, finding that the government systematically targets religious minorities including Baha’is, Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims.

The Lautenberg Program provides a legal path for refugee resettlement for religious minorities from Iran and former Soviet Union countries fleeing persecution, which helps to reunify families. As this program no longer [operational](#), and with the effective suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, there is no lifeline for processing Iranian religious minorities for resettlement to the United States.

Violations of International Law

5. **Attacks on civilian infrastructure** – During the January 2026 protests, multiple [reports](#) verified that the security forces of the Islamic Republic forced entry into hospital grounds, assaulted healthcare providers, and arrested injured protesters seeking medical care. Since early March, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) healthcare attacks [monitor](#) shows at least 21 attacks on health workers and facilities in Iran since the war began. Separately, WHO has [identified](#) 16 health facilities damaged, and 4 hospitals are closed due to the conflict.

Additionally, the Iranian regime has attacked a water desalination plant in Kuwait as well as [Bahrain](#). Intentional attacks on civilian infrastructure, including desalination plants and healthcare workers, are clear violations of international humanitarian law.

6. **Iran’s internet blackout** – Iran’s severe internet shutdown has reduced connectivity by 99 percent and is now the longest sustained internet shut down affecting an entire country in

history. The blackout affects an estimated 90 million citizens and contravenes human rights law as [outlined](#) in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The costs of such a blackout are estimated to be around \$37 million a day, and furthermore make displacement tracking, casualty verification, and humanitarian coordination extremely difficult. The Iranian regime has reportedly distributed thousands of “[white SIM cards](#)” to loyalists who will amplify propaganda, and exploit a vacuum left by silenced opposition voices.

Global Cascading Effects

7. **Humanitarian costs of an energy crisis** – The International Energy Agency ([IEA](#)) has said the conflict with Iran has triggered the “largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market,” noting that the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, normally carries around 20% of global oil consumption. With the strait effectively closed to commercial shipping, only a few ships can pass through, and most of these are oil tankers that are used by sanctioned countries. This closure has had a direct impact on the humanitarian aid that displaced populations receive.

This is because fuel is a critical resource in the humanitarian system. Generators keeping field hospitals running, trucks delivering water to refugees, and a host of other operations are now seeing increased costs. The International Rescue Committee has outlined how the Iran war has disrupted aid [supply chains](#) in multiple contexts, threatening life-saving operations across Africa.

There is also another energy market that may be hit just as hard: natural gas. Liquefied natural gas (LNG), primarily methane, is an important fuel source for desalination plants, power generation, and food processing. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG, also known as propane) is often used as a cooking fuel. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees are dependent on LPG to boil water and cook food, with 99% of households relying on it through humanitarian aid. This community, living in one of the world's largest refugee camps, will be directly impacted as the supply chain breaks down.

8. **Food security and malnutrition** – One of the starkest warnings over the last month came from the World Food Program (WFP), which [warned](#) on March 19 that an additional 45 million people could be pushed into acute hunger around the world, with places like Sudan, South Sudan, Gaza, Yemen, and Mali at particular risk. At this level, households have food

consumption gaps that cause malnutrition and can often meet minimum food needs only by using essential livelihood assets through crisis-coping strategies.

Closed shipping routes have also prevented the movement of fertilizer. About one-third of the world's fertilizers are shipped through the Strait, and Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman are some of the world's leading exporters of nitrogen fertilizers, such as urea and ammonia. Limited supply of fertilizer and rising costs create a chain reaction where countries restrict or halt food exports. With up to half of the world's population [depending](#) on food produced with the help of fertilizers, these disruptions complicated efforts to address hunger in fragile states.

In Sudan, where over 20 million people face acute food insecurity, nearly 50% of its food imports transit the Gulf. This has forced the WFP to cut rations for famine-condition populations. Unlike with oil, an immediate global [shortfall](#) has no quick substitutes, and there are no international fertilizer stockpiles. The 2026 planting cycle is set to begin soon in many of the impacted countries, meaning that even if strait reopens, some of the damage is locked in.

Collapse of the Humanitarian Response

9. **Collapse of humanitarian funding and response infrastructure** – The dissolution of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), once the world's leading donor of humanitarian assistance, has created major funding [gaps](#) for humanitarian organizations. In March 2026, the U.S. State Department formed a new humanitarian [bureau](#), but it has not articulated a strategy for the Iran conflict.

In FY 2026 Congress appropriated \$5.5 billion through the State Department's International Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance accounts, but this has not yet been released and is still a fraction of previous funding levels. Analysts have made the case that withholding aid is a [policy choice](#), and that a coherent humanitarian strategy is desperately needed.

10. **Dubai's humanitarian city and logistics** – One of the key logistical hubs for response is Dubai's International Humanitarian City, which is now severely [constrained](#). The WFP uses the hub to store thousands of high-density nutritious foods, intended for children in Afghanistan, Gaza, Sudan, and many other countries facing acute hunger.

There has been some positive progress recently in repositioning supply chains, with agencies finding alternative corridors for shipments. The UN has announced a [task force](#) to safeguard aid, taking inspiration from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and others.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the chaos, you have the people of Iran. Trapped on all sides, targeted for speaking out against the regime, and under aerial bombardment from the sky by major powers. They currently live in near disconnection from the world. Each day the conflict continues to create new unforeseen problems, and the reality is that no one can fully comprehend the war's devastation while a near-total internet blackout is in effect.

Taken together, the above ten issues begin to show the scale of impact that the Iran war is having not just on Iranians, or those in the Middle East, but vulnerable communities around the world. The energy crisis exacerbates a global food crisis, while the aid funding shortfall makes the rising costs to the humanitarian logistics hub even more dire.

As the war continues, human suffering grows. The most difficult and important step now is to deescalate the conflict to bring the war to an end. The UN Secretary-General has appointed Jean Arnault as his Personal Envoy to lead efforts to stop the escalation, engage in diplomacy, and respect international law. The Secretary General has [called](#) on the United States and Israel to stop the war, and for Iran to stop attacking its neighbors.

USCRI supports the following actions:

1. **The United States Congress should fund the humanitarian response in the Middle East and North Africa region.** The most effective response will involve the United States working directly with frontline implementing partners, including national and local organizations. A report that includes how the Administration will spend funding within the State Department's International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) account has yet to be submitted and was due in March, 2026. This should be requested to give Congress visibility and oversight into how resources will be used.
2. **Congress should request the release of \$5.5 billion in already-appropriated State Department humanitarian funds and support additional resources to address emergent humanitarian needs, especially in Lebanon.** Congress should also direct a portion towards the secondary food crises now emerging in Sudan, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa because of the Hormuz closure.

3. **Congress should act to restore and operationalize the Lautenberg-Specter program for Iranian religious minorities.** The program is not operational both because of the suspension of refugee admissions and the closure of Resettlement Support Centers.
4. **All parties to the conflict should adhere to international standards and follow international humanitarian law.** This includes ceasing attacks on civilian infrastructure and working to guarantee humanitarian access.
5. **All parties to the conflict must establish and respect humanitarian corridors, both at land and sea.** The UN Secretary-General's task force on Hormuz humanitarian access is an important diplomatic opening that the United States should support.

Further Reading

1. **Displacement** – [UNHCR: Up to 3.2 million Iranians temporarily displaced in Iran as conflict intensifies](#), March 12, 2026
2. **Lebanon** – [A War Within the War: Israel's Bombardment of Lebanon](#), New York Times
3. **Impact on Children** – [Humanitarian crisis for children deepens after one month of war in the Middle East](#), UNICEF, March 31, 2026
4. **Religious Minorities** – [Iran's Minorities Will Pay the Price for Trump's War](#), Foreign Policy, March 24, 2026
5. **International Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Infrastructure** – [Middle East Conflict: Rhetoric, Actions Flout Laws of War](#), Human Rights Watch, March 26, 2026
6. **Internet Blackout** – <https://netblocks.org/>
7. **Global Energy Crisis** – [The Middle East and Global Energy Markets](#), IEA
8. **Food Security and Malnutrition** – [Devex Dish: How the Iran war could trigger a global food crisis](#), March 18, 2026
9. **Collapse of the Humanitarian Funding and Response Infrastructure** – [The Iran War Is Breaking Global Humanitarian Aid Efforts](#), March 12, Council on Foreign Relations
10. **Dubai's Humanitarian City, Logistical Breakdown** – [Iran war complicates WHO's emergency medical supply routes](#), al-Monitor, March 26, 2026

USCRI, founded in 1911, is a non-governmental, not-for-profit international organization committed to working on behalf of refugees and immigrants and their transition to a dignified life. For press inquiries, please contact: media@refugees.org. For policy inquiries, please contact: policy@refugees.org.