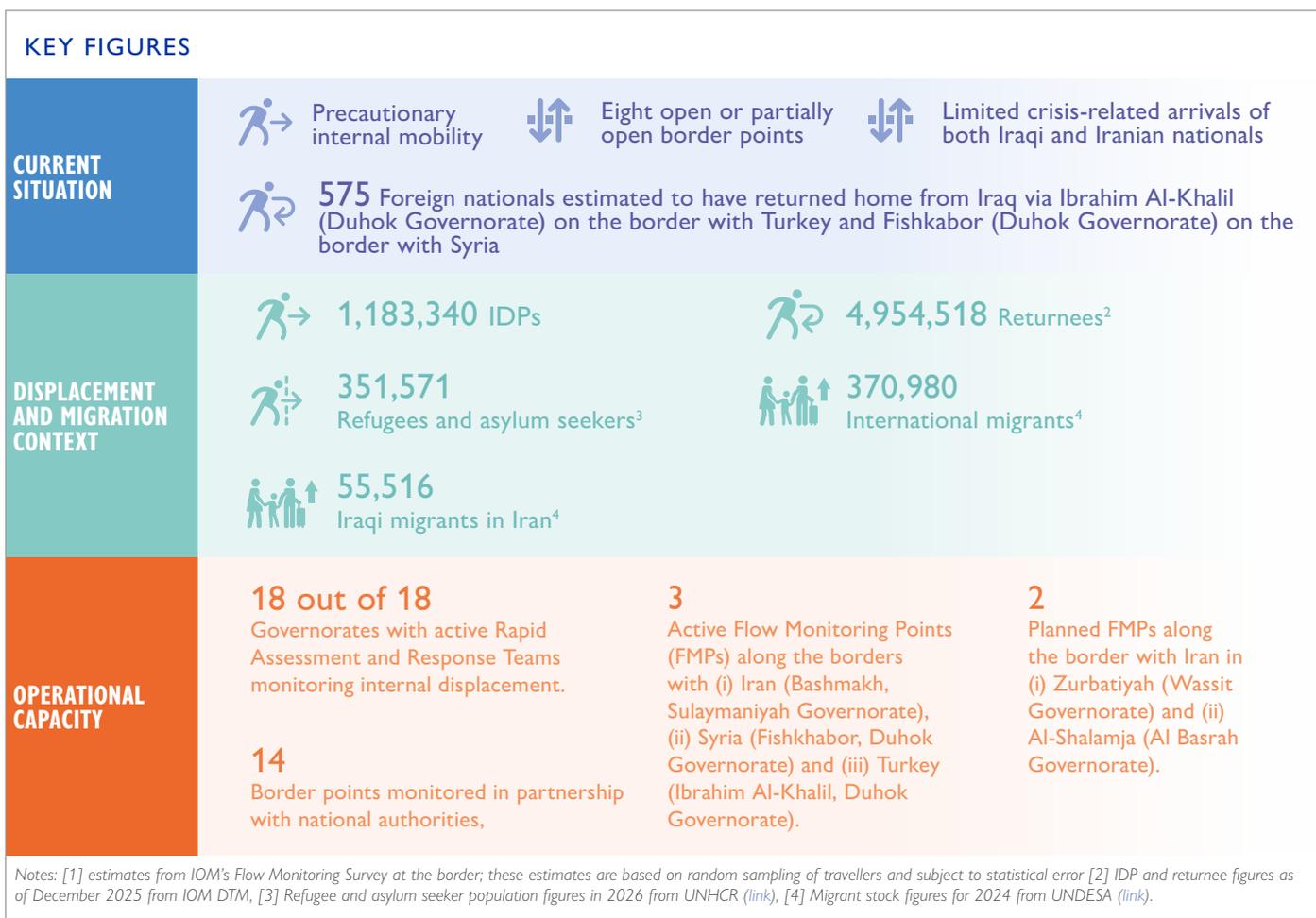


UPDATE ON CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN IRAQ

SITUATION AS OF 16 MARCH 2026

A significant escalation in regional tensions occurred on 28 February 2026 following coordinated military strikes by the United States of America and Israel inside Iran which triggered subsequent retaliatory missile and drone activity across multiple countries in the region. In Iraq, the security situation remains fluid, with disruptions affecting airspace, civilian mobility, and humanitarian access. This crisis compounds pre-existing vulnerabilities linked to Iraq's complex security dynamics and protracted displacement associated with the conflict with the Daesh. Continued monitoring of internal displacement and cross-border mobility dynamics remains critical to inform operational planning, preparedness and humanitarian response.



OPERATIONAL CAPACITY FOR DISPLACEMENT MONITORING

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plays a key role in the systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of data on migration and displacement in Iraq. Working in close coordination with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD), IOM monitors mobility dynamics across the country and at its borders. IOM implements its global data collection system, the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), applying standardized methodologies to generate timely, reliable, and comparable data on population movements¹. DTM provides granular, location-level information on displacement trends, population profiles, and mobility patterns, enabling continuous monitoring of evolving dynamics. DTM data serves as a critical evidence base for operational planning and decision-making, supporting humanitarian, recovery, and stabilization interventions.

As a global public good, IOM makes DTM data available to government counterparts and humanitarian partners to inform coordinated response efforts, enhance targeting of assistance, and optimize the allocation of resources across preparedness, response, and return contexts.

To monitor **internal displacement and return**, IOM DTM relies on trained Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs), consisting of 40 local responders with over a decade of operational experience. RARTs maintain deep-rooted institutional connections to local authorities across all governorates, with the capacity for rapid scaling, and leverage a network of approximately 3,732 key informants. RARTs provide constant situational awareness and early warning, monitoring local developments and verifying

1 See the DTM Methodological Framework.

any reports of displacement through Emergency Tracking assessments at the location level. Additionally, they conduct regular countrywide assessments to update displacement stock estimates and, based on need, multi-sector needs assessments.

To **monitor cross-border mobility and displacement**, IOM DTM operates flow monitoring points (FMPs) at key transit locations, such as border crossings and major travel routes. At these points, trained enumerators conduct short interviews with travellers to collect data on population movements, including routes, demographics, mode of travel,

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

While no large-scale or lasting displacement incidents have been confirmed across Iraq as of March 16, the continued escalation in security incidents, including drone and missile strikes, has triggered notable precautionary mobility and heightened community concern.

In Al-Qa'im District (Al-Anbar Governorate), residents in the Hey-Alsikak area continue vacating their homes at night due to their proximity to potential security targets, returning only in the morning. Similar precautionary movements continue to take place in Erbil, where some families are leaving the city to stay with relatives in surrounding rural areas. Although these movements remain limited and largely temporary, continued security incidents could increase the risk of localized displacement, particularly in areas located near potential military targets.

Since the start of the crisis, airstrikes and drone attacks have been reported in at least eleven governorates, with incidents in Al-Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Al-Najaf, Ninewa, Al-Sulaymaniyah and Wassit. Nine governorates experienced new security incidents between 10-16 March, with an overall increase in the number of incidents reported across the country. While these strikes have primarily been aimed at military targets, exceptions include targeted strikes on hotels in Baghdad and Erbil, on the US embassy in Baghdad, and on oil infrastructure in Al Basrah, Dohuk and Erbil Governorates. In isolated incidents, falling debris from interceptions caused injuries among civilians and damage to civilian properties. Protests related to ongoing events have taken place in three governorates, highlighting the risks of the crisis for social cohesion and stability within Iraq.

The security situation has also impacted public services; notably, schools and universities have been suspended or shifted online in most of the governorates as a precautionary measure. Long queues at petrol stations and electricity outages have also affected households and businesses across the country. In some areas, the population has begun stockpiling essential items, resulting in localized increases in the price of food.

CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY

Iran border

Iraq shares a long land border with Iran that runs across six governorates: four in Federal Iraq, Diyala, Wassit, Missan, and Al Basrah, and two in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Erbil and Al Sulaymaniyah. Usually, regular cross-border movements take place between the two countries for trade, business and tourism. Since the start of the crisis, staff shortages, disruptions to information systems, and nearby air strikes have affected border operations on the Iranian side resulting in temporary closures.

and reasons for crossing. IOM currently operates three FMPs along the borders with Iran (Bashmakh, Sulaymaniyah Governorate, active since 15 March 2026), Syria (Fishkhabor, Duhok Governorate) and Turkey (Ibrahim Al-Khalil, Duhok Governorate), collecting data on a daily basis. Two additional FMPs are being activated along the border with Iran in response to the current crisis (Zurbatiyah, Wassit Governorate, and Al-Shalamja, Al Basrah Governorate). Additionally, IOM works closely with the Ministry of Interior and the Border Commission to monitor mobility dynamics across a broader set of border crossing points (BCPs).

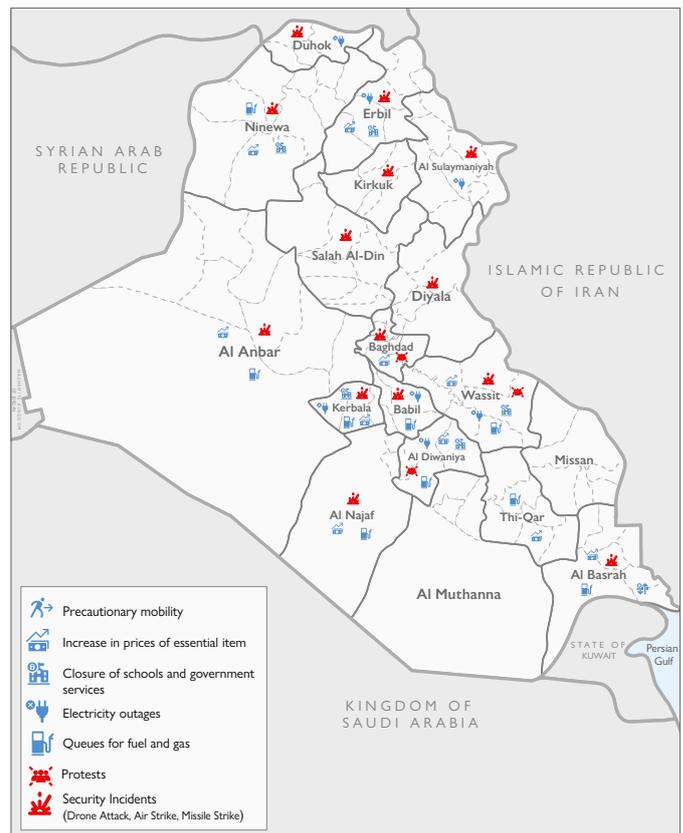


Figure 1: Humanitarian impact of the crisis and displacement risk factors inside Iraq. The information is reported at the governorate level based on reports from DTM field teams and media sources since 1 March 2026 and may not be exhaustive. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As of 16 March, several border points had re-opened enabling the resumption of both regular and crisis-related travel. Across the Iraq–Iran border, four BCPs were fully open: Al-Sheeb (Missan governorate, Federal Iraq), Zurbatiyah (Wassit governorate, Federal Iraq), Al-Shalamja (Basrah governorate, Federal Iraq), and Hajj Omran (Erbil governorate, KRI). Four BCPs in Sulaymaniyah governorate (KRI), Twila, Broizkhan, Siran Bin, and Bashmakh, were partially closed; across these, commercial transit remained permitted, while the return of nationals was limited to Bashmakh, Twila,

and Broizkhan. The remaining crossings were fully closed: Sumar/Mandeli and Muntheriyah (Diyala governorate, Federal Iraq), as well as Kele and Pshta (Sulaymaniyah governorate, KRI).

While large-scale cross-border displacement has not been observed at the time of publication, estimates by key informants at the border suggest that at least 95 Iraqis have returned by land as a result of the crisis since 1 March (see table 1 for estimates of daily movements on 16 March). Key informants also reported 230 incoming cross-border movements by Iranian citizens related to the crisis, including both instances of forced displacement and circular movements by Iranian citizens coming to Iraq for the day to source essential goods or access functioning telecommunications systems. Since its activation on 15 March, the DTM flow monitoring point in Bashmagh (Al Sulaymaniyah) recorded the arrival of 53 Iranians displaced by the conflict (see Figure 3). All of them moved to locations within Sulaymaniyah governorate, often to stay with relatives. Although most BCPs reported no vulnerable groups among incoming movements by both Iraqi and Iranian citizens, Bashmagh and Zurbatiyah identified several, including unaccompanied or separated children, older persons, and families with small children.

Precautionary mobility patterns and disruptions to cross-border travel highlight the potential for rapidly evolving population movements if the security situation deteriorates further. In 2024, UNDESA estimated that there were 55,516 Iraqi migrants living in Iran, many of whom may consider returning. The Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement reports an increasing number of requests for assistance to the embassy in Tehran by Iraqis seeking to return home, which at present cannot be addressed due to significant increases in the price of land return journeys.

Across several BCPs, key informants also reported regular commercial and non-commercial movements, both incoming and outgoing. On 16 March, 2,460 incoming movements and 2,100 outgoing movements were recorded, unrelated to the crisis. For some open or partially open BCPs it was not possible to gather estimates of incoming or outgoing movements, so these estimates should be considered a lower bound. Among the seven open or partially open BCPs reporting incoming movements², most indicated that flows were broadly unchanged compared to the previous day: Twila, Broizkhan, Al-Shalamja, and Zurbatiyah reported movements as stable; however, Bashmagh noted a decrease, and both Hajj Omran and Al-Sheeb reported movements as much lower (both open BCPs). Similar to incoming movements, Bashmagh, Twila, Broizkhan, Al-Shalamja, and

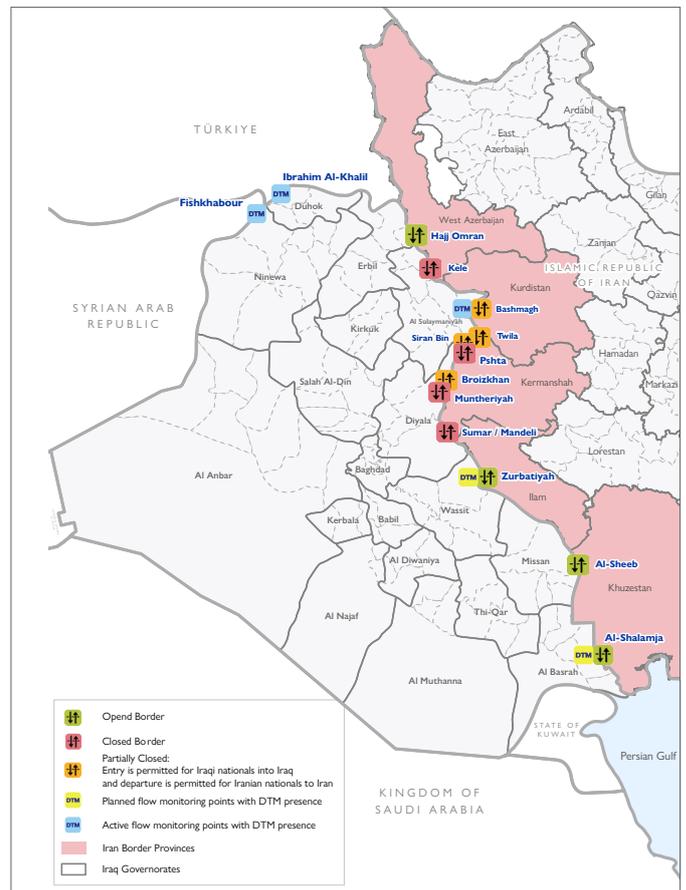


Figure 2: Status of border crossing points along the Iraq-Iran border and location of DTM flow monitoring points. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Zurbatiyah characterized outgoing movements as consistent with those observed in previous days, while Hajj Omran and Al-Sheeb reported much lower levels.

The only BCP that reported preparedness measures for a potential emergency was Zurbatiyah (Wassit governorate, Federal Iraq), where they were led by border authorities. These included support to border health facilities, improvements to water, hygiene, and sanitation services, the deployment of ambulances and fire trucks, and the establishment of an emergency response and evacuation plan.

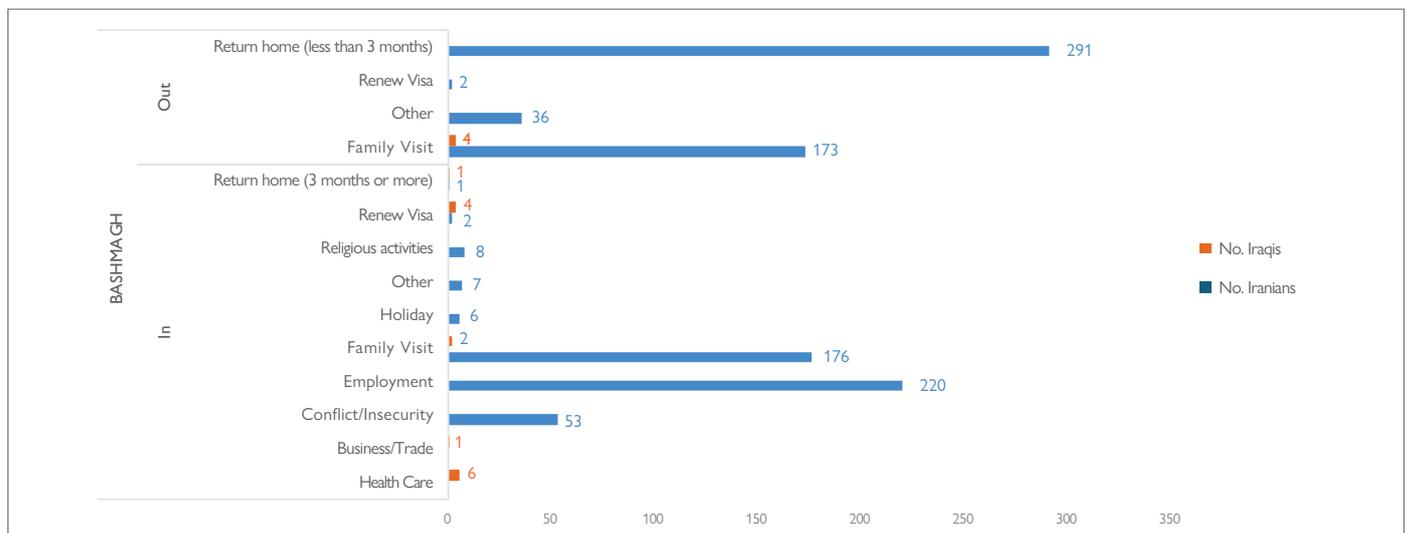


Figure 3: cross-border flows recorded by DTM Flow Monitoring Registry at Bashmagh (Al Sulaymaniyah governorate), 15-16 March 2026. Estimates may differ from those collected by key informants due to flow monitoring operating only during working hours and key informant estimates being approximations.

2 No movements were reported at Siran Bin (Al Sulaymaniyah Governorate), despite the point being partially open.

Türkiye and Syria border

IOM is also conducting Flow Monitoring Surveys at Ibrahim Al-Khalil (Duhok Governorate), on the border with Türkiye, and Fishkabor (Duhok Governorate), on the border with Syria. Due to the volume of traffic, these surveys are conducted with a random sample of travellers using interval sampling and are therefore subject to statistical error. Based on

this data, IOM estimates that 575 foreign nationals returned home from Iraq via these two land crossings between 10-16 March³. The countries of nationality of returning travellers included Syria, France, Germany, Portugal, Türkiye and the United Kingdom.

Table 1: status of border crossing points along the Iraq-Iran border and estimated flows based on reports by border authorities

GOVERNORATE	BORDER POINT	TYPE	STATUS	INCOMING MOVEMENTS DAILY ESTIMATE ON 16 MARCH ⁴	OUTGOING MOVEMENTS DAILY ESTIMATE ON 16 MARCH
Al Basrah	Al-Shalamja	Formal	Open	No crisis related movements 2,000 ind. regular movements	No crisis related movements. 1,500 ind. regular movements
Diyala	Sumar / Mandeli	Formal	Closed on both sides	None reported	None reported
Diyala	Muntheriyah	Formal	Closed on both sides	None reported	None reported
Erbil	Haji Omran	Formal	Open	Movements noticeably decreased	Movements noticeably decreased
Missan	Al-Sheeb	Formal	Open	Movements noticeably decreased	Movements noticeably decreased
Al Sulaymaniyah	Bashmagh	Formal	Partially open (restrictions on the Iranian side)	30 ind. Iranian crisis related 5 ind. Iraqi crisis related 430 ind. regular movements	No crisis related movements 550 ind. regular movements
Al Sulaymaniyah	Broizkhan	Formal	Partially open (restrictions on the Iranian side)	Movements were stable; commercial transit and return of nationals permitted	Movements were stable; commercial transit and return of nationals permitted
Al Sulaymaniyah	Twila	Formal for KRI only	Partially open (restrictions on the Iranian side)	Movements were stable; commercial transit and return of nationals permitted	Movements were stable; commercial transit and return of nationals permitted
Al Sulaymaniyah	Kele	Formal for KRI only	Closed on the Iranian side since 28 February 2026	None reported	None reported
Al Sulaymaniyah	Siran Bin	Formal for KRI only	Partially open (restrictions on the Iranian side)	None reported; commercial transit permitted	None reported; commercial transit permitted
Al Sulaymaniyah	Pshta	Formal for KRI only	Closed on the Iranian side since 28 February 2026	None reported	None reported
Wassit	Zurbatiyah	Formal	Open	35 ind. Iranian crisis related 20 ind. Iraqi crisis related 30 ind. regular movements	35 ind. Iranian crisis related. No Iraqi crisis related. 50 ind. regular movements

³ The estimates are based on a sample size of 199 respondents (43 at Ibrahim Al-Khalil and 156 at Fishkabor), out of whom 28 were foreign nationals returning home, weighted for the overall volume of traffic at each location. Data collection takes place only during regular working hours and was suspended 1-9 March as a security precaution.

⁴ Estimates are provided by border authorities and other Key Informants familiar with the situation at each BCP. Where a numerical estimate is not available, informants provide an estimate of changes relative to the previous day. Regular movements include commercial and trade related traffic, commuting, and other personal movements unrelated to the crisis.