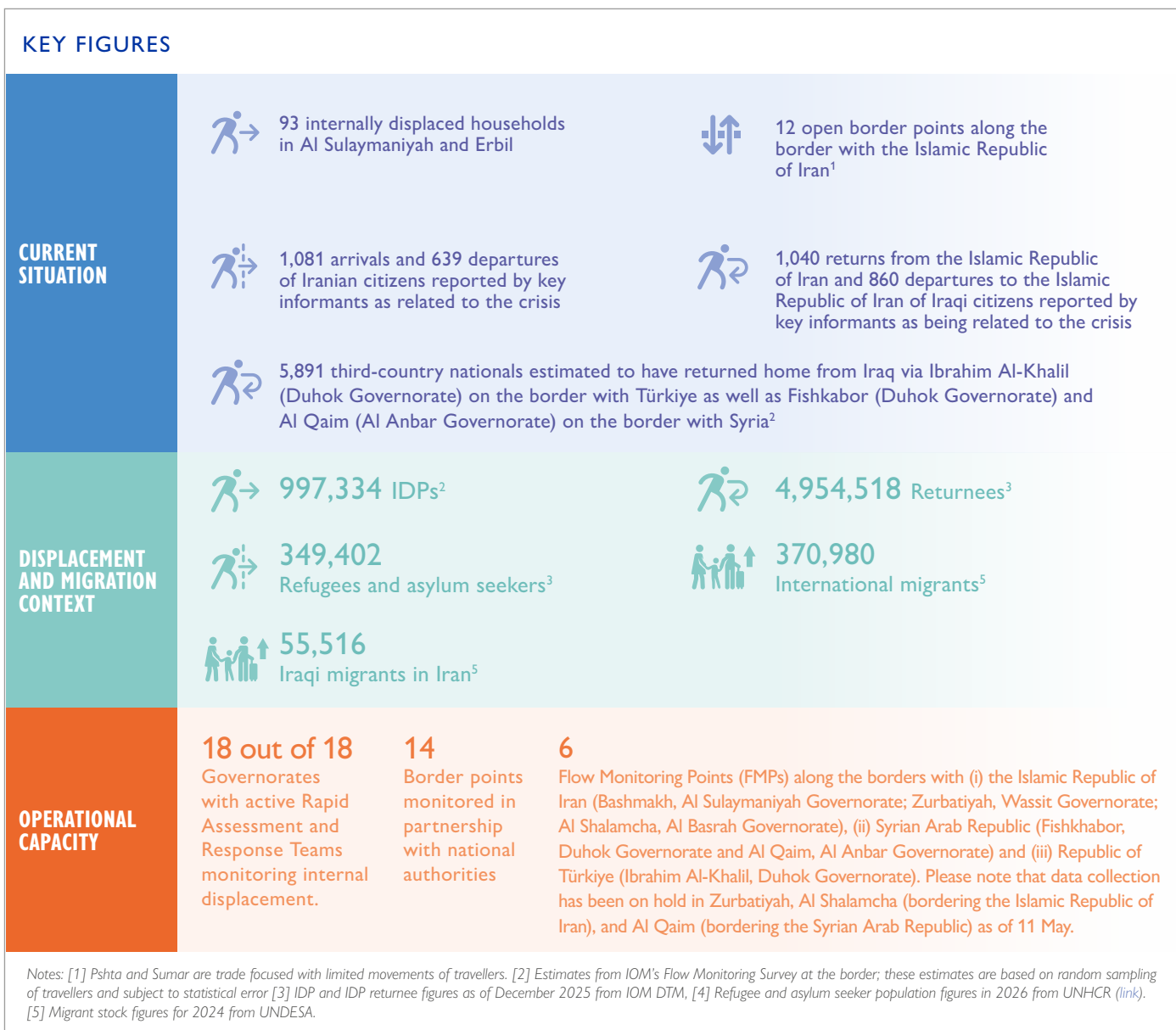


UPDATE ON CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN IRAQ

SITUATION AS OF 18 MAY 2026

Regional tensions persist following escalatory military activity in and around the Islamic Republic of Iran since late February 2026. While a fragile ceasefire has remained in place since 8 April, Iraq continues to face cross-border impacts linked to broader regional instability. These dynamics further exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities associated with Iraq's complex security environment and protracted displacement linked to the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This update addresses concerns around the effects hostilities have on displacement and cross-border mobility. IOM Iraq continuously monitors displacement and cross-border movements to provide timely and actionable data to support operational planning, preparedness and humanitarian response.



1 See the DTM Methodological Framework.

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 in Iraq, 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 over 3,700 Key Informants (KIs). RARTs provide constant situational awareness and early warning, monitoring local developments and verifying 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.

DRIVERS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Since the start of the escalations, IOM tracked 93 internally displaced households, with no additional instances of displacement recorded since 13 April. Displacement remains limited despite ongoing drone threats in two governorates (Al Sulaymaniyah and Erbil) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) during the reporting period.

Since the start of the crisis, airstrikes and drone attacks have been reported in at least 15 governorates, including Al Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Al Basrah, Diyala, Duhok, Erbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Al Najaf, Ninewa, Missan, Salah Al-Din, Al Sulaymaniyah, and Wassit. Many incidents continue to target military and security forces but also displacement sites.

Despite the extension of the ceasefire linked to regional escalations, Iraq continued to face localized security disruptions during the reporting period. In Erbil Governorate, repeated drone activity remained the main concern: on 13 May, a drone strike targeted an Iranian settlement in Jezhnikan, Bahirka Subdistrict, north of Erbil, reportedly hitting an ammunition depot, but with no fatalities reported; further drone attacks took place targeting the same area on 15 May. Furthermore, on 15 May, debris from an aerial projectile reportedly fell into a wheat field in Erbil Governorate, causing a localized fire that was quickly contained, highlighting growing concerns over indirect impacts on agricultural livelihoods during the wheat and barley harvest season. In Sulaymaniyah Governorate, on 16 May, a loud explosion in Piramagroon Subdistrict (near Qazan village) was confirmed to be linked to the controlled neutralization of an old drone. On 18 May 2026, multiple missiles reportedly targeted an Iranian, Kurdish settlement in the Surdash area of Dokan District, northwest Al Sulaymaniyah Governorate, reportedly injuring two foreign nationals. Local reporting also indicated accompanying drone activity during the incident. Overall, repeated drone activity in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah continues to reflect the persistence of hostilities related risks despite broader de-escalation efforts.

Meanwhile, in Al-Qadisiyah Governorate, KIs reported limited cooking gas supplies at a main distribution point causing overcrowding, clashes, and injuries highlighting pressures on local resources. Together, localized security incidents and economic pressures, including resource scarcity linked to ongoing hostilities during the reporting period, underscore the need for continued monitoring to support preparedness and enable an evidence-based and timely response.

To monitor cross-border mobility and displacement in Iraq, 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, and reasons for crossing. IOM operates three FMPs along the borders with the Islamic Republic of Iran (Bashmagh, Al Sulaymaniyah Governorate, active since 15 March 2026; Zurbatiyah, Wassit Governorate, and Al-Shalamcha, Al Basrah Governorate, active since 17 March 2026), two on the border with Syria (Fishkhabor, Duhok Governorate, and as of 30 April 2026 Al Qaim, Al Anbar Governorate) and one on the border with Türkiye (Ibrahim Al-Khalil, Duhok Governorate), collecting data on a daily basis. As of 11 May, data collection has been temporarily suspended in Zurbatiyah and Al Shalamcha (bordering the Islamic Republic of Iran), as well as Al Qaim (bordering the Syrian Arab Republic). 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).

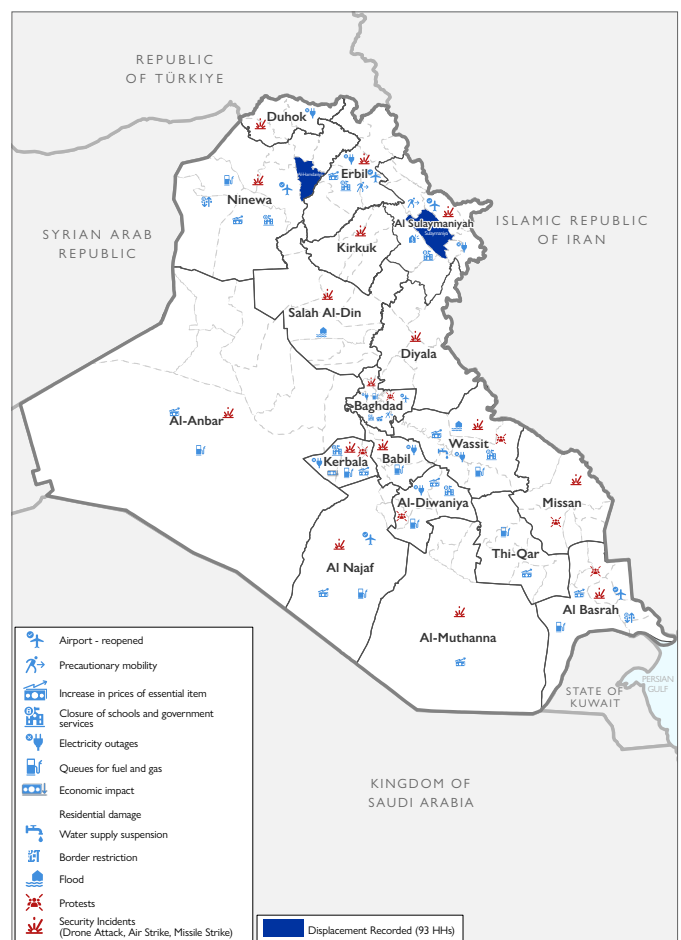


Figure 1: Humanitarian impact of the crisis and displacement risk factors inside Iraq. The information is reported at the governorate level based on reports from DTM field teams and media sources since 1 March 2026 and may not be exhaustive. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries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

CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY

Islamic Republic of Iran Border Monitoring²

Iraq shares a long land border with the Islamic Republic of Iran that runs across six Governorates: four in Federal Iraq, Diyala, Wassit, Missan, and Al Basrah, and two in the KRI, Erbil and Al Sulaymaniyah. Regular cross-border movements take place between the two countries for trade, business, tourism, and religious activities. All 12 BCPs remained open during the reporting period. While regular travel volumes haven't reached pre-hostilities levels, flows are increasing since the initial closures following the start of the hostilities.

As of 18 May 2026, border conditions remained broadly stable compared to the previous reporting period (week ending 11 May), with all crossing points remaining open and no major restrictions observed. All BCPs reported in- and out-going movements with exceptions unrelated to the current escalations, such as border closures on Fridays or movements being – as before the conflict – restricted to trade at Pshta and Sumar BCPs. Despite the open BCPs, IOM received information from KIs that travel has not yet reached levels from before the escalations began. Previous border closures were observed primarily between the start of hostilities at the end of February until mid-April.

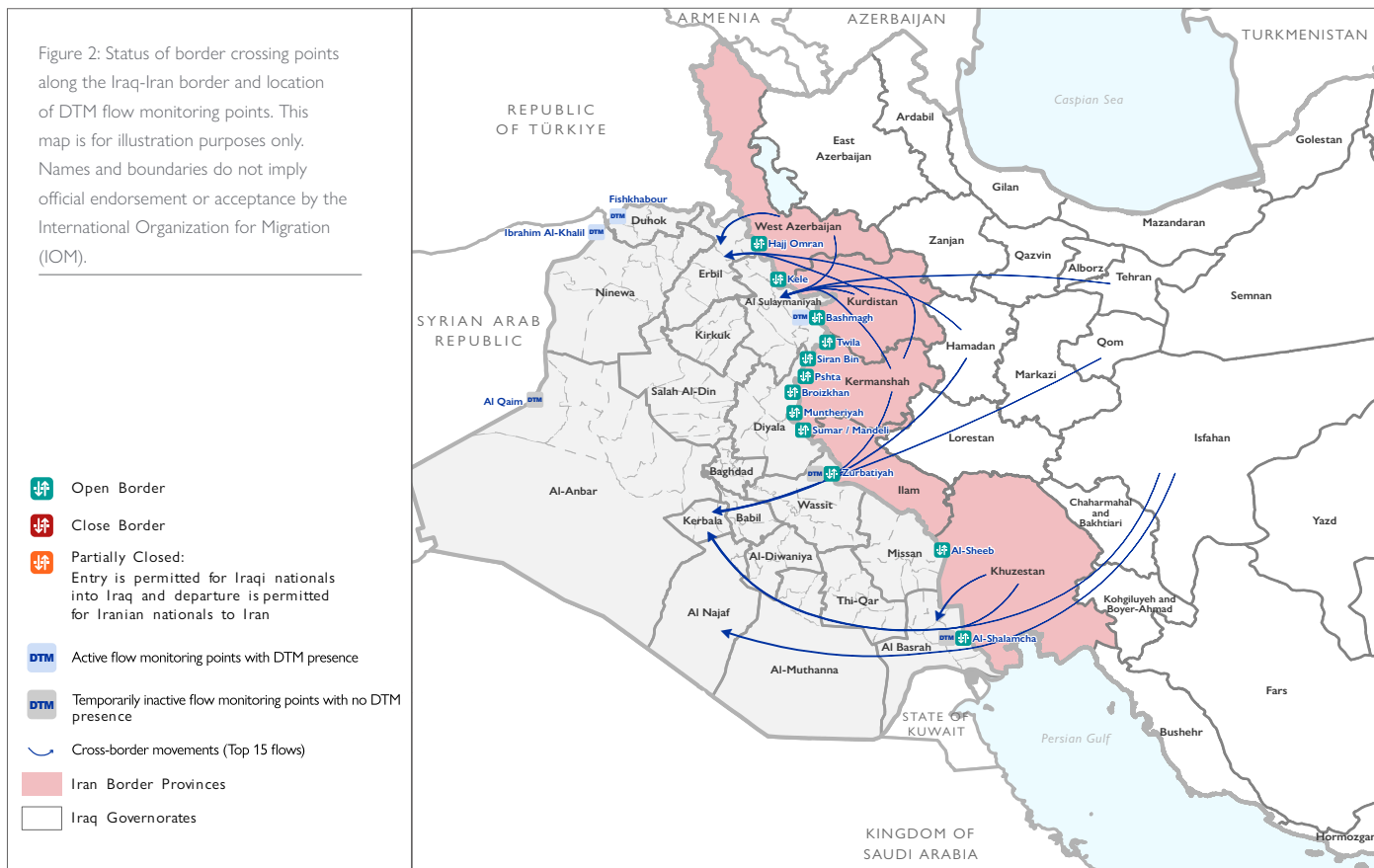
Key informants reported flows broadly similar to the previous reporting week with increases in incoming and outgoing flows reported at Hajj Omran and Zurbatiyah. The situation at the Hajj Omran BCP has reportedly nearly normalized with students returning to universities in Iran, medical travel picking up again and commercial activity increasing. Iran has started importing vehicles through Erbil, unlike before the start of hostilities in February this year. This trend has made the border significantly more active. Tourist travel to and from Iraq through the borders has, however, not restarted.

No BCPs reported emergency response or security incidents during the reporting period.

Islamic Republic of Iran Flow Monitoring³

Between 12 and 18 May,⁴ Flow Monitoring access was restricted to Bashmagh where DTM teams recorded 2,072 incoming and 2,084 outgoing movements representing a 47 per cent increase in incoming movements and 12 per cent decrease in outgoing movements (compared to movement through Bashmagh the previous reporting week). Iranian nationals accounted for 74 per cent of incoming and 73 per cent of outgoing movements. Other Third Country Nationals (TCN) were not reported as having traveled through Bashmagh.

Among incoming Iranian movements, the main reported purposes were family visits (43%), employment (33%), and tourism (12%). Meanwhile, no travelers reported movement linked to conflict or insecurity during the reporting period. Outgoing movements of Iranian nationals were primarily driven by returns to the Islamic Republic of Iran following long-term (66%, 3 months or more) or short-term (30%, less than 3 months) stays. All incoming movements by Iraqi citizens were instances of return by migrants who had been residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran for over three months. Iraqi nationals who returned home (over 3 months) moved to locations within Al Sulaymaniyah (99%), with a minority going to Erbil (1%). Iraqi nationals leaving the country primarily cited family visits (40%), tourism (21%), healthcare (11%) and religious activity (11%) as main reasons for travel.



2 Border monitoring relies on key informant estimates from border officials across all BCPs.
 3 Flow monitoring is implemented by DTM at three BCPs, limited to working hours and subject to security conditions. Unlike border monitoring, which is based on estimates from border officials, flow monitoring relies on interviews with individuals crossing the border.
 4 Note that IOM's Flow Monitoring operations have been put on hold in Zurbatiyah, Al Shalamcha, and Al Qaim BCPs as of 11 May.

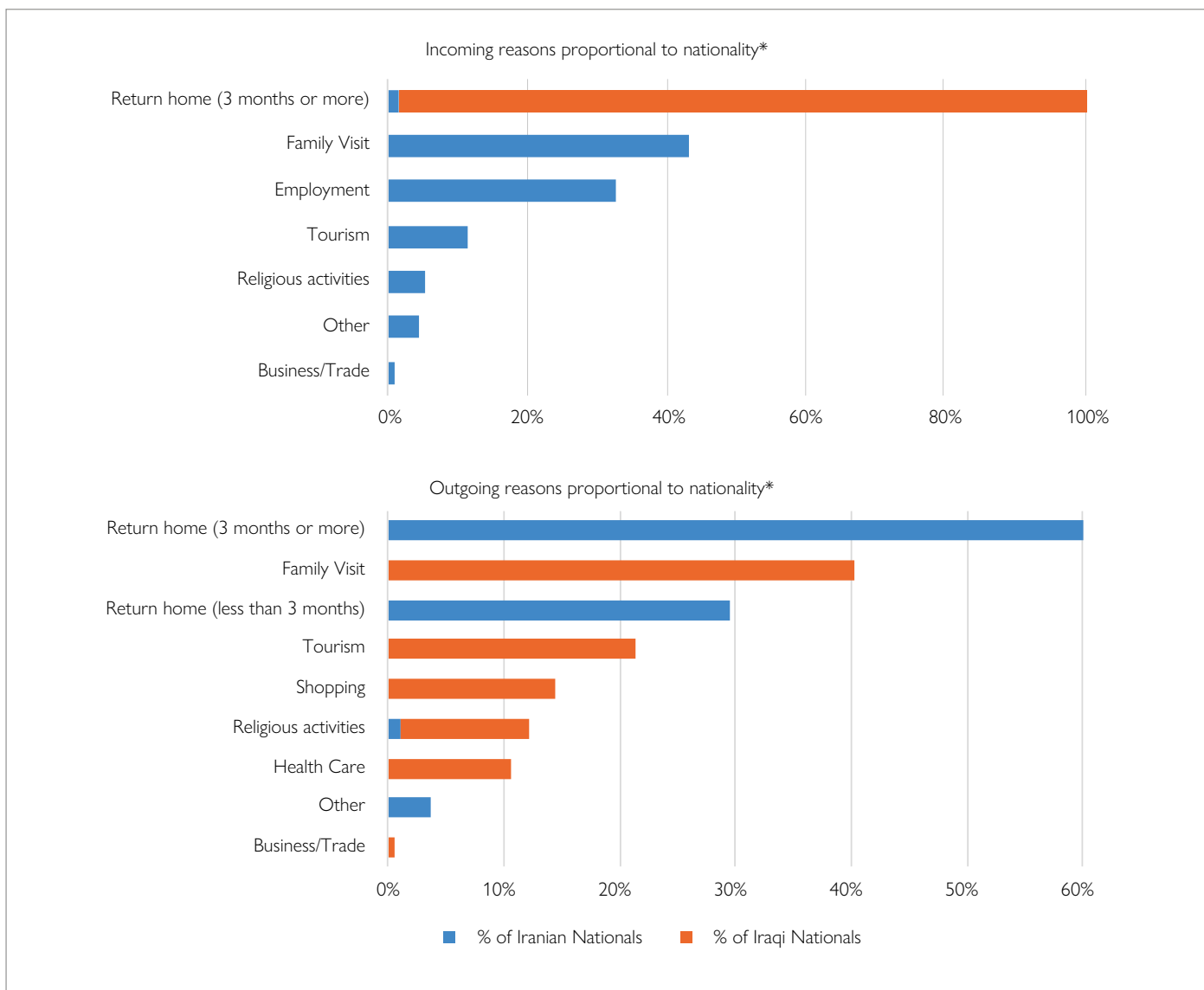


Figure 3 : breakdown of arrivals from and departures to the Islamic Republic of Iran by reason for movement

*TCNs are not represented.

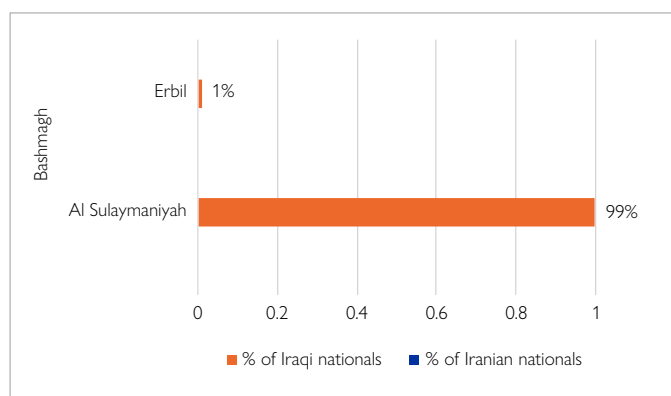


Figure 4: breakdown of arrivals from the Islamic Republic of Iran of Iranian citizens (movements related to the crisis) and Iraqi citizens returning home (3 months or more) by Flow Monitoring Point and governorate of destination.

Republic of Türkiye and Syrian Arab Republic Flow Monitoring

IOM is also conducting Flow Monitoring Surveys at Ibrahim Al-Khalil (Duhok), on the border with the Republic of Türkiye, in addition to Fishkabor (Duhok) and Al Qaim FMP on the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. 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 5,891 TCNs returned home from Iraq via these three land crossings between 10 March and 18 May 2026.⁵ The countries of nationality of these travellers included nationals of the Republic of Türkiye, the Syrian Arab Republic, Germany, France, Italy, China, Portugal, United States of America, Nigeria, United Kingdom, and five further countries.

5 The estimates are based on a sample size of 1,795 respondents (1,323 at Ibrahim Al-Khalil, 360 at Fishkabour and 112 at Al Qaim with no new data from Al Qaim since 11 May due to a temporary FMP inactivity), out of whom 249 were TCNs 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.