

INTERSECTING DRIVERS OF IRAQI EMIGRATION

SECURITY, ECONOMY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSORS

JULY 2025



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KEY FINDINGS

This study aims to identify the main drivers of outmigration from Iraq, explore the relationships between different drivers and highlight the specific impacts of climate change and environmental degradation within these broader mobility patterns. The findings are based on surveys of two distinct groups of Iraqi travellers: 1) emigrants (n = 282), who have already established a new habitual residence abroad, and 2) potential emigrants (n = 23), who are either a) planning to leave the country for at least three months (outgoing) or b) have returned to Iraq after leaving for at least three months (incoming). Given the small number of potential emigrants observed during the data collection period (n = 23), findings related to this group should be interpreted with caution and validated by larger studies. Beyond the main quantitative component of this study, insights from a focus group discussion (FGD) with individuals deported to Iraq are incorporated into the analysis.

During the data collection period (September–January 2025), DTM surveyed a total of 4,813 travellers across three border monitoring points. Most of those observed were temporary travellers (86%, n = 4,129), while 5 per cent were emigrants and less than 1 per cent were potential emigrants. The limited number of potential emigrants suggests that population outflows through these border crossing points were low during the study period, compared to visits by established emigrants and to the overall volume of travellers.

The main drivers of migration for emigrants and potential emigrants revolve around livelihoods, security, living conditions and, among potential emigrants, education. Respondents who cite environmental factors also tend to mention the aforementioned drivers (living conditions, livelihoods and security). Moreover, considerable shares of emigrants and potential emigrants reported adverse consequences from slow-onset events on their areas of habitual residence (39% and 66%, respectively). Among those who reported negative consequences from either extreme weather or slow-onset events, one quarter of emigrants and nearly three quarters of potential emigrants indicated a medium or strong impact from these environmental events on their family's living conditions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Emigrants were primarily male (66%), between the ages of 35–60 (73%) and married (85%). Potential emigrants were mainly male (82%), between the ages of 18–34 (73%) and single (63%).

Regarding employment, around half of emigrants are economically active, mainly through self-employment (22%), employment in the private sector (18%) or daily wage work (10%). Most potential emigrants were economically inactive (85%), primarily because they were students (63%). The top sectors of employment for these groups include services, hospitality and sales; trained manual work and transportation. Economically active potential emigrants similarly work in these occupations, while also engaging as managers, professionals and office workers (30%).

Only 2 per cent of respondents reported agriculture as their main occupation. However, all of these individuals indicated a loss of crop production, livestock deaths or reduced fishing yields due to environmental factors.

REASONS FOR MIGRATING

Migration drivers among emigrants centred on difficult living conditions in Iraq (including access to services and adequate housing); war, conflict and persecution; and employment-related factors. Regarding environmental drivers, 4 per cent noted slow-onset events and 3 per cent mentioned extreme weather events.

Outgoing potential emigrants primarily left Iraq for education, job opportunities and better living conditions. A minority cited slow-onset events as a reason for leaving.

Incoming potential emigrants tended to leave for family visits and tourism, along with work and study opportunities abroad. Additionally, 9 per cent mentioned slow-onset events.

FGD participants explained that they had left Iraq seeking better pay and access to medical treatment. They noted that their current salaries in Iraq did not allow them to support themselves and their families.

INTERSECTING DRIVERS OF OUTMIGRATION

A range of overlapping factors, such as difficult living conditions; war, conflict and persecution; and employment, pushed emigrants to leave Iraq. For outgoing potential migrants, those who intended to leave Iraq for education also pointed to a lack of livelihood opportunities in-country. Incoming potential migrants, for their part, typically left to visit relatives abroad as a tourist or foreign worker.

Respondents who mentioned environmental factors as a driver also referred to living conditions; employment-related factors; and war, conflict and persecution. Changes in the environment may undermine the viability of certain occupations and the availability and quality of basic services like water, electricity and health care. These dynamics may, in turn, fuel disputes over natural resources or heighten pre-existing tensions in affected communities. Thus, environmental migration from Iraq should be considered multi-causal, with environmental changes affecting security, economic and social conditions within their communities.

REASON FOR MIGRATING BY AREA OF ORIGIN

The top governorates of origin include Baghdad, Ninewa, Dahuk and Erbil. Additionally, potential emigrants left from Wassit and Babil.

Emigrants from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq tended to leave the country due to difficult living conditions and employment opportunities, while those from north-central governorates highlighted war, conflict and persecution alongside difficult living conditions. Respondents from central-southern Iraq also reported war, conflict and persecution; difficult living conditions and employment as their main motivations for leaving the country. Lastly, emigrants from southern Iraq similarly pointed to difficult living conditions; employment-related factors; and war, conflict and persecution. However, those from southern Iraq were more likely to mention environmental factors, along with select governorates further north (Salah al-Din, Ninewa, Wassit and Baghdad).

Among outgoing potential emigrants, study represented the main driver across governorates, with some exceptions. Livelihoods were commonly mentioned by respondents from Wassit and Babil, while living conditions

were indicated among those from Diyala and Baghdad. Moreover, family reunification or marriage represented a notable driver for outgoing potential emigrants from Diyala.

For incoming potential emigrants, visiting relatives and holidays or tourism were the top reasons for migrating. However, respondents from Baghdad also left the country to work abroad and because of slow-onset events. Those from Ninewa also left to study abroad, claim refugee status, find work abroad and due to cultural factors.

REASON FOR MIGRATING BY YEAR OF DEPARTURE

With respect to time trends, emigrants who left Iraq due to war, conflict and persecution; difficult living conditions and, to a lesser extent, employment-related factors tended to migrate during the 2014 – 2017 crisis with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. By contrast, those who left for family reunification or marriage mostly left before 2011, while those studying abroad have mainly migrated since 2015. Emigrants citing either extreme weather events or slow-onset events have primarily migrated since 2016.

INTENDED DESTINATION BY REASON FOR MIGRATING

Surveyed emigrants primarily resettled in Türkiye but also Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Potential emigrants mainly indicated Türkiye as their intended destination and, to a lesser extent, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Cyprus.

Emigrants who left Iraq due to war, conflict and persecution; education; and environmental factors primarily resettled in Türkiye. Those emigrating due to difficult living conditions and for employment went to Türkiye, but also European countries like the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Germany. On the other hand, emigrants moving abroad for family reunification or marriage mainly travelled to European countries, especially Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Finland.

Potential emigrants travelling to the Islamic Republic of Iran all left for education. Those intending to reach Türkiye, on the other hand, mentioned a wider range of factors, including study but also lack of

livelihood opportunities, better living conditions and family reunification. All those who mentioned environmental factors sought to reach Türkiye.

FGD participants tended to choose destinations based on the presence of family and friends along with factors like lifestyle and job opportunities.

IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Around two in five emigrants and two thirds of potential emigrants reported that slow-onset events adversely affected their area of habitual residence. Among those who reported negative consequences from either an extreme weather or slow-onset event, a quarter of emigrants and three quarters of potential emigrants indicated the event had either a medium or strong impact on their family's living conditions.

Emigrants and potential emigrants were more likely to report adverse impacts from slow-onset events compared to extreme weather events. The most common slow-onset events observed were changing rainfall and temperature patterns, while the most prevalent extreme weather events were floods and dust/sandstorms.

MIGRATION HISTORY

Around half of potential emigrants had previously migrated abroad. Additionally, 7 per cent of emigrants had been internally displaced within Iraq before migrating, although the share among potential emigrants was considerably higher (29%). Moreover, only 1 per cent of emigrants and 7 per cent of potential emigrants had voluntarily migrated within Iraq prior to leaving the country.

CONCLUSION

Emigration from Iraq is driven by a wide range of factors from war, conflict and persecution to difficult living conditions and employment. Additionally, FGD participants highlighted the challenges of insufficient salaries and the importance of supporting their families and securing a better future. Therefore, efforts to promote peace and stability, protect marginalized groups and strengthen service provision would help address the adverse conditions contributing to migration. Moreover, working conditions can be improved through regularization of work and promotion of workers' rights.

INTRODUCTION

Through its [Cross-Border Monitoring](#) Activities, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) surveys travellers entering and exiting Iraq through three international border crossing points. These activities provide insights into migrants' demographic characteristics, areas of origin, reasons for travel, intended destinations, travel arrangements and migration history.

In parallel, DTM monitors displacement linked to drought, desertification and water salinization in central and southern Iraq, termed as 'climate-induced displacement.' As of December 2024, 170,274 individuals remain displaced due to climatic and environmental factors across 12 governorates in central and southern Iraq.¹ The tracking exercise focuses on displacement within Iraq, as nearly four in five climate-induced migrants moved within their governorate of origin.²

This thematic assessment builds on the aforementioned activities by highlighting the top drivers of migration from Iraq, the relationship between various drivers and the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on these broader migration patterns.

The assessment analysis centres on two distinct groups – 1) emigrants, who have already established a habitual residence abroad and 2) potential emigrants either a) leaving Iraq for at least three months (outgoing) or b) returning to Iraq after spending at least three months abroad

(incoming). Moreover, the quantitative findings described in this report are complemented by an analysis of a focus group discussion (FGD) held with Iraqi deportees to provide further nuance on drivers of international migration.

The report begins with a desk review of the drivers of migration, the relationship between climate change and migration and historical migration patterns from Iraq. It then presents the demographic profile of emigrants and potential emigrants, as well as their main livelihoods. The next section highlights the drivers of migration for emigrants, outgoing potential emigrants and incoming potential emigrants. Since respondents are able to select multiple reasons for migrating, the relationship between various drivers is also explored. The subsequent section considers how drivers vary based on governorate of origin. Thereafter, time trend analysis examines how reasons for migration have changed over time. The subsequent section explores the relationship between different drivers and intended destinations. Following this, the report considers the impact of extreme weather and slow-onset events on respondents. The final section examines the migration history of respondents, including internal displacement, internal migration and international migration.

DRIVERS OF MIGRATION FROM IRAQ

Carling (2002) has described migration decision-making as a function of aspirations and capabilities.³ Aspirations reflect the desire to migrate, while capacities refer to one's ability to do so.⁴ In turn, aspirations and capacities are shaped by micro-, meso- and macro-level factors.⁵ Micro-level factors include individual preferences, educational attainment and skillsets. Meso-level factors refer to the influence of social networks and societal norms on mobility patterns.^{6, 7} Lastly, macro-level factors involve broader socio-economic processes and histories connecting countries, as well as the role of the state in regulating migration.⁸ In a systematic review of the determinants of migration aspirations, Aslany et al. (2021) found that micro-level factors like age and past experiences migrating or travelling abroad and meso-level factors like knowing current or former migrants had the strongest and most consistent relationship with migration aspirations.⁹ Moreover, macro-level factors such as violence or insecurity and dissatisfaction with public services appeared to have a substantial effect on migration aspirations, although these drivers are relatively understudied.¹⁰

Taken together, these factors shape drivers of migration, which Van Hear et al. break down as follows.¹¹ Predisposing drivers refers to contextual variables which increase the probability of migration, such as disparities between countries in terms of earnings and living conditions. Proximate drivers reflect changes in the context which influence the decision to migrate, such as an economic recession, the outbreak of war or environmental degradation. Precipitating drivers directly result in migration and tend to be linked to a specific

event, such as the loss of a job, occurrence of an extreme weather event or persecution. Finally, mediating drivers promote or restrict migration flows, such as transportation, information and financial resources to leave.

The relationship between climate change and migration is typically indirect, with environmental changes influencing preexisting drivers of migration.^{12, 13, 14, 15, 16} Black et al. (2011) established a conceptual framework to map these interactions.¹⁷ Changes in environmental conditions impact five 'families' of migration drivers, namely social, economic, demographic, political and other environmental factors. These drivers, alongside personal or household characteristics and intervening obstacles and facilitators (e.g. social networks, the political/legal landscape, etc.), result in a decision to stay or leave.¹⁸ This framework underscores the importance of context when analysing climate-induced migration, as the same outcome can produce opposite effects in different locations.^{19, 20} For example, reduced crop production linked to climatic factors may increase migration in some contexts, as individuals or households seek alternative livelihoods.^{21, 22} On the other hand, the drop in household income from reduced crop production may prevent individuals from relocating since they lack the means to move.²³ As a result, it is difficult to isolate the effects of environmental changes from other community-level variables. This challenge is further compounded by the fact that migrants themselves may not identify environmental conditions as a reason for their movement, even in contexts where extreme weather events function as precipitating drivers.²⁴

In Iraq, climate-induced displacement is unfolding against the backdrop of decades of conflict, insecurity and persecution, which has triggered considerable international outmigration. During Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq (1979–2003), waves of displacement were precipitated by conflicts including the 1980–1988 war between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the 1988 Al-Anfal campaign against the Kurds and the 1990–1991 Gulf War.²⁵ In 2003, the United States of America led an intervention into Iraq, which ousted Hussein and triggered a period of instability and sectarian violence.²⁶ This contributed to massive displacement within and from the country.²⁷ While the violence subsided between 2008 and 2012, the situation began to deteriorate further in 2013, eventually resulting in the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).²⁸ The ISIL conflict lasted from 2014 until 2017.²⁹

As of 2024, a total of 2,313,028 Iraqi international emigrants were recorded worldwide.³⁰ The number of Iraqi emigrants doubled between 2005 and 2010, declined through 2015, then rose again through 2024.³¹ Outflows of Iraqi refugees, asylum seekers and other people in need of international protection peaked to 1.4 million in 1991, primarily toward the Islamic Republic of Iran.³² Other key years for international displacement include 2007–2008 and 2014–2017, corresponding to periods of sectarian conflict and the ISIL conflict described above.^{33, 34}

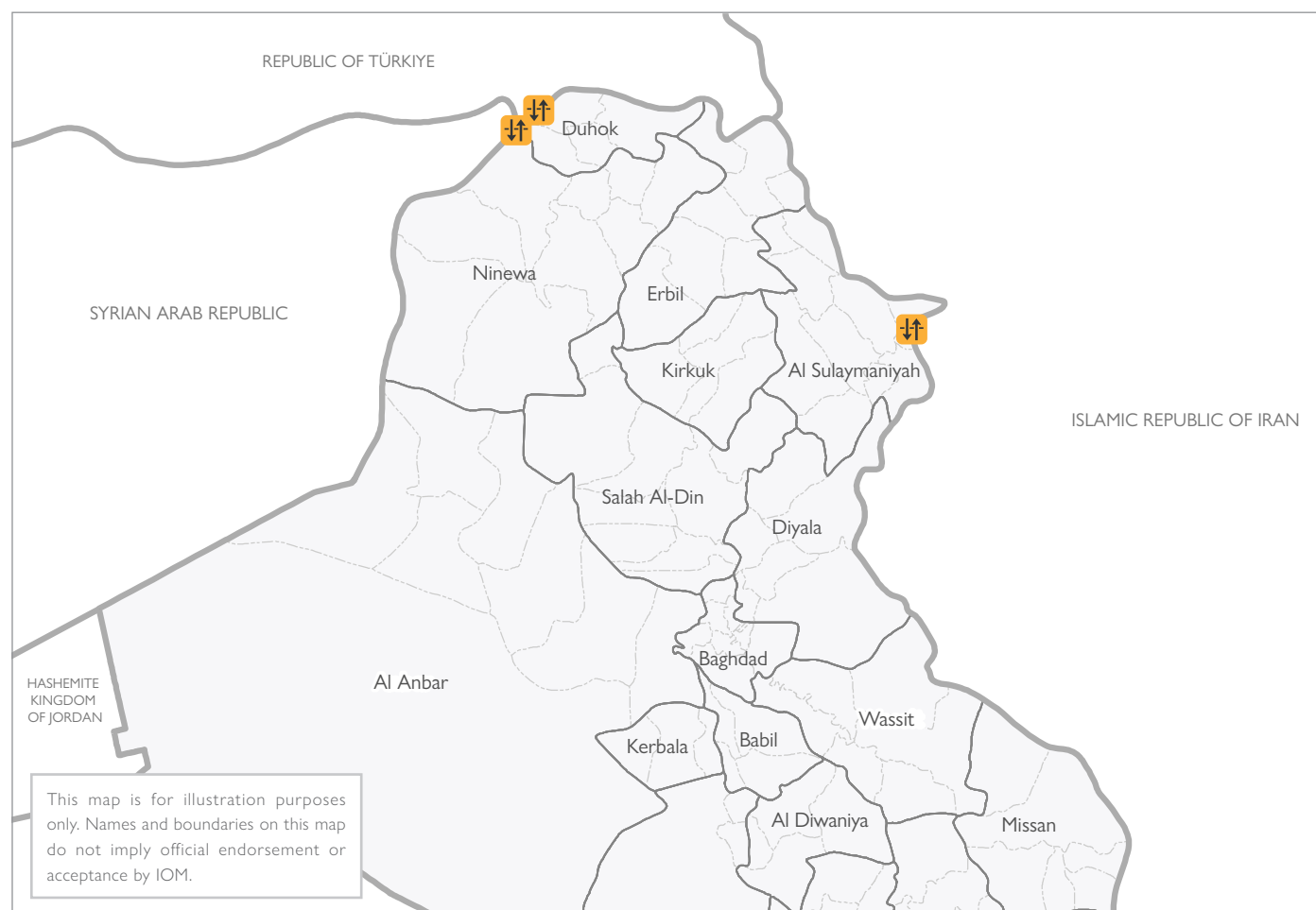
The main countries of destination for Iraqi emigrants included neighbouring countries like Türkiye, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic; European countries like Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; North American countries like the United States of America and Canada; as well as Australia.³⁵ Countries of asylum generally correspond with the countries of destination for international migrants, with the inclusion

of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the exclusion of the United States of America, Canada and Australia.³⁶

With respect to climate-induced displacement, by contrast, most of those displaced move within their governorate – and sometimes district – of origin, suggesting a localized mobility pattern. Climate-induced migrants largely come from rural areas which are impacted by a wide range of extreme weather events like droughts and sand and dust storms, as well as slow-onset events like increased water salinity, soil degradation and changing rainfall patterns.³⁷ Those engaged in climate-sensitive livelihoods such as farming, livestock rearing and fishing appear to be the most vulnerable because changing environmental conditions directly impact the productivity of these activities and, thus, household income.³⁸ The most common coping strategy for these environmental changes is to send a household member to another location for work, representing another form of mobility distinct from the long-term displacement of entire families due to environmental factors.^{39, 40} This may potentially represent a pre-migration, whereby the relocation of a single household member lays the groundwork for the rest of the family to move.⁴¹ In other cases, the movement of some family members for work may enable the rest of the household to stay where they are.^{42, 43} Access to alternative livelihoods or income sources may also allow some families to remain in place.⁴⁴ In the face of these multi-faceted stressors, individuals or households may eventually reach a 'tipping point' where they exhaust their adaptive capacity and feel compelled to leave.⁴⁵ Some families move to rural locations to continue practicing agricultural activities, while others move to urban locations in the hope of finding more livelihood opportunities.⁴⁶

METHODOLOGY

Map 1: Border crossing points monitored by IOM DTM



Data for this analysis come from IOM DTM's existing [Cross-Border Monitoring](#) activities in Iraq. Cross-Border Monitoring provides information on the number of individuals and vehicles transiting three selected land border points with Türkiye, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is focused on profiling travellers and migrants in terms of their demographic characteristics, reasons for travel and vulnerabilities. The border points involved in this activity are the following:

- Ibrahim Al-Khalil in Dahuk Governorate, bordering Türkiye;
- Fishkhabour in Dahuk Governorate, bordering the Syrian Arab Republic;
- Bashmagh in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, bordering the Islamic Republic of Iran;

Ibrahim Al-Khalil is an official border crossing point for both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, while Fishkhabour and Bashmagh are official only for the Kurdistan Regional Government. The data utilized for this analysis were collected between September 2024 and January 2025, corresponding to five months of data collection. For future assessments, it is recommended to maintain this survey over a longer timeframe to increase the sample size. Additionally, the period of data collection should include the summer months (May to September) as more individuals are expected to leave due to weather-related factors.

Cross-Border Monitoring data are collected through IOM's enumerators, composed of over 14 staff members (38% of enumerators are female) deployed at the border crossing points, five days per week (weekdays only) from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Travellers for face-to-face interviews are selected randomly through the adoption of a 'systematic step/interval' selection process – i.e. travellers are systematically selected at fixed intervals from the start of the workday. The interval is fixed at 1:3 (one in every three individuals will be selected for an interview). All travellers 18 years and older who were crossing borders were eligible for an interview, regardless of their nationality. To estimate the total number of travellers and their characteristics, a sampling weight is applied.

POPULATION GROUPS CONSIDERED

For the purposes of Cross-Border Monitoring, the term 'travellers' refers to all individuals crossing an international border with Iraq. The reference population for Cross-Border Monitoring is:

- travellers (Iraqis and non-Iraqis) who enter Iraq after being abroad (incoming flow); and
- travellers (Iraqis and non-Iraqis) who exit Iraq to travel to other countries (outgoing flow).

Within the reference population, some travellers are of specific interest, for example, migrants (defined as travellers entering/leaving Iraq for more than three months). To identify this population, all sampled travellers are asked a screening question about the length of travel to check whether they satisfy the criteria.

Travellers are divided into five main groups according to their nationality, country of habitual residence and duration of stay, as defined below:

TRAVELLER CATEGORY	DEFINITION
TEMPORARY TRAVEL	
Temporary travellers (n = 4,129)	Individuals who are crossing an international border with Iraq for a period of up to three months . This includes two subgroups: a) foreign nationals who usually reside abroad and who arrive in Iraq for up to three months or depart from Iraq after being in the country for up to three months and b) Iraqi nationals returning to the country after having spent up to three months abroad or departing from Iraq with the intention to stay abroad for less than three months.
MIGRATION FROM IRAQ	
Potential emigrants (n = 23)	For the purpose of this report, Iraqi nationals who are either a) planning to leave the country for the least three months (outgoing) or b) have returned to Iraq after leaving for at least three months (incoming). ⁴⁷
Emigrants (n = 282)	Iraqi nationals who have already moved away to another country such that this country has effectively become their new country of habitual residence, regardless of the intended length of stay.
MIGRATION TO IRAQ	
Potential immigrants (n = 229)	Foreign nationals who are entering Iraq with the intention to stay for a period of three months or more and foreign nationals who are departing from Iraq after having been in the country for three months or more .
Immigrants (n = 150)	Foreign nationals who have moved away from their country of nationality such that Iraq has effectively become their new country of habitual residence, regardless of their intended length of travel.

Within this report, the sample is restricted to Iraqi potential emigrants and emigrants observed crossing a land border between September 2024 and January 2025. Considering the report’s focus on climate-induced migration from Iraq, potential emigrants and emigrants are the main population groups of interest.

A total of 305 Iraqi emigrants or potential emigrants were surveyed during the assessment period, including 282 emigrants and 23 potential emigrants. This corresponds to a total weighted sample of 7,442 individuals. Moreover, roughly two thirds of respondents were male (67%, n = 210), compared to one third who were female (33%, n = 95). Unless otherwise indicated, all percentages presented in this report reflect the weighted sample. However, the number of observations, indicated by the symbol n, refers to the unweighted sample size.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The quantitative survey was complemented by a focus group discussion with returning potential emigrants held in October 2024 at the IOM Dahuk office. A total of eight individuals (seven men and one woman) participated in the discussion. All participants were Iraqi nationals between the ages of 18 and 24 who were deported back to Iraq through the Ibrahim Al Khalil Border Crossing Point. Participants were purposively selected by IOM enumerators at Ibrahim Al Khalil based on their observations of incoming potential emigrants. Future FGDs with this category of travellers should consider diversifying the profile of participants to include more women and age groups.

LIMITATIONS

The resulting data are representative of the individuals crossing at each of the selected border points separately only during the times of data collection. Data should not be generalized and do not represent a full picture of inter- and intraregional migration, but rather of migration flows at the selected border points. This methodology does not account for those travelling through informal border crossing points or those travelling at night. This may explain the small number of potential emigrants surveyed during the study period.

Data collected in assessed border points should not lead to assumptions about border crossings in non-assessed border points or areas without monitoring points. Notably, travel via airports is not considered in this exercise.

With respect to the FGD, the findings cannot be generalized to the overall population of either potential emigrants or deportees. Additionally, participants may be influenced by social desirability bias, causing them to describe the situation in a more positive light than warranted and downplay negative events, out of a desire to present a favourable image of themselves and their community. This bias is particularly relevant considering the lack of anonymity in an FGD. Moreover, group dynamics and power imbalances in terms of age, status and other factors may influence the willingness and ability of participants to share their unique views. On the other hand, the presence of IOM staff may have created an expectation of assistance, thus colouring respondents’ descriptions of their experiences.

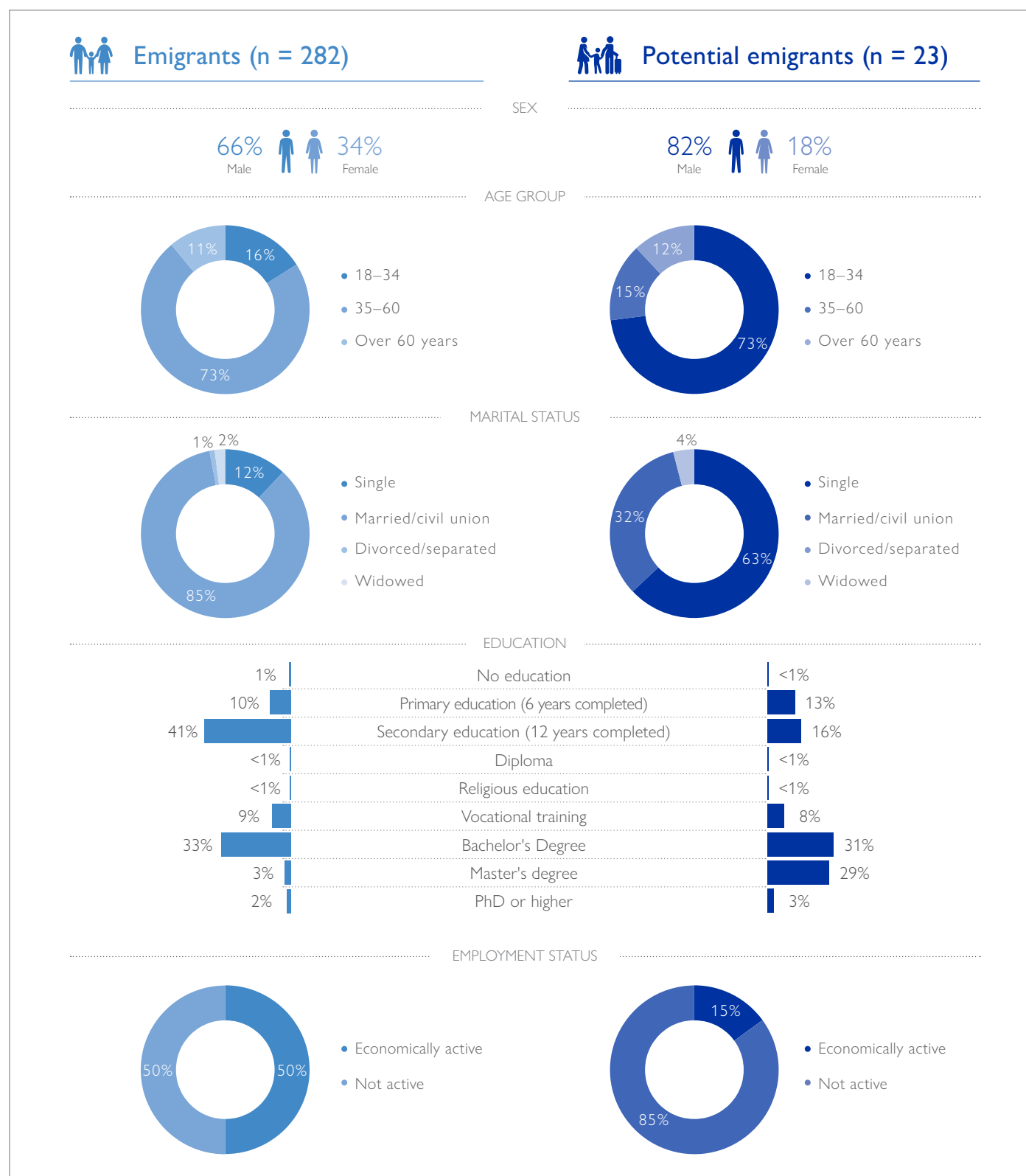
For an overview of the methodology behind the Flow Monitoring activities, please consult the [Cross-Border Monitoring Methodological Overview](#). For a more detailed presentation of the implementation and steps, please consult the [Flow Monitoring Methodological Guide](#).

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Between 1 September 2024 to 30 January 2025, DTM randomly surveyed 4,813 individuals crossing three land border crossing points between Iraq and its neighbouring countries – the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye.⁴⁸ This represents a weighted sample of 129,146 individuals. Out of these travellers, 282 respondents were Iraqi emigrants who

resided abroad, while 23 respondents were Iraqi potential emigrants intending to leave the country for at least three months or more. This corresponds to a weighted sample of 6,936 emigrants and 506 potential emigrants. Given the small sample of Iraqi potential emigrants, findings for this group should be interpreted with caution and confirmed by subsequent assessments.

Figure 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of emigrants vs. potential emigrants



Around two thirds of emigrants (66%) are men, compared to four in five (82%) potential emigrants. Moreover, around three quarters of emigrants (73%) were between the ages of 35 and 60. Potential emigrants tended to be younger, with most falling in the 18-to-34-year age range. This finding appears to support the negative relationship between migration aspirations and age.⁴⁹

While the majority of emigrants were married or in a civil union (85%), potential emigrants were more often single (63%).

Equal shares of emigrants and potential emigrants completed their secondary education (79%). However, potential emigrants were more likely to have a Master's degree compared to emigrants (29% vs. 3%).

Half of emigrants (50%) were economically active at the time of the interview. Most of this group were self-employed (22%), employed in the private sector (18%) or engaged in daily wage work (10%). Emigrants who were not economically active were mainly retired (23%) or engaged in housework (13%).

On the other hand, 85 per cent of potential emigrants were not economically active, largely because they were students. The remaining shares were engaged in daily wage work (5%), private sector employment (4%) or self-employment (3%). Only 3 per cent were not working and actively looking for a job.

Figure 2: Current occupations of emigrants (n = 282)

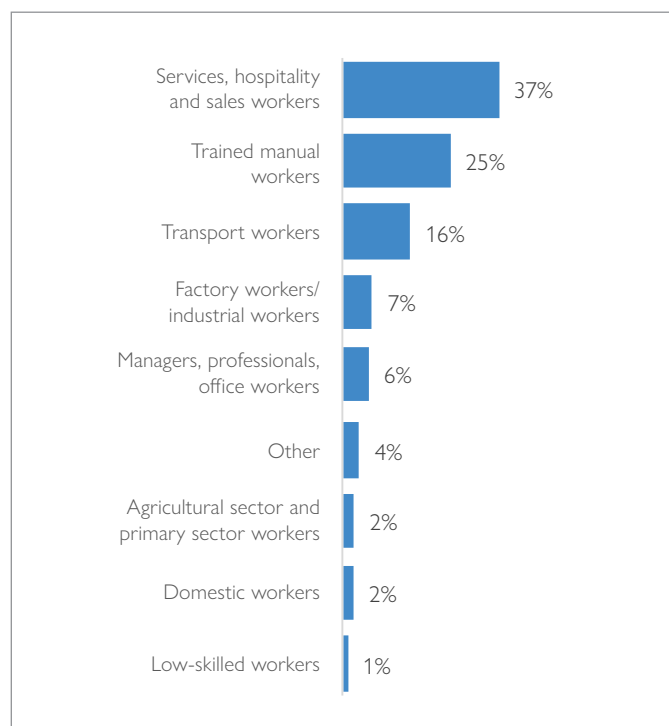


Figure 3: Current occupations of potential emigrants (n = 23)



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

The survey asked respondents about their current occupation or, in case of more than one occupation, the most profitable activity. Among working emigrants, the most common occupations included services, hospitality and sales workers (37%); trained manual workers (25%) and transport workers (16%). For potential emigrants, employment as managers, professionals or office workers was also relatively common (30%), in addition to trained manual work (44%) and transportation (25%).

Only 2 per cent of respondents worked in the agricultural sector, including farmers, livestock rearers or fishers. However, within this group, all reported a loss of crop production, livestock deaths or reduced fishing yields due to environmental factors.

FGD participants also mentioned that Turkish airstrikes in their villages prevented them from accessing their lands and engaging in agriculture.

REASONS FOR MIGRATING

This section discusses the main reasons respondents cited for leaving Iraq. Those surveyed could rank up to three reasons for leaving the country. For this analysis, the reasons provided are aggregated by frequency, without weight to the relative rank of the reason (i.e. first reason, second reason, etc.). Potential emigrants were asked this question upon their departure (i.e. outgoing flows) and return (i.e. incoming flows) to Iraq. For emigrants, the analysis focuses on their original reasons for leaving Iraq, as opposed to the reasons for their current travel.

Figure 4: Main reasons for leaving Iraq (emigrants) (multiple options permitted) (n = 282)

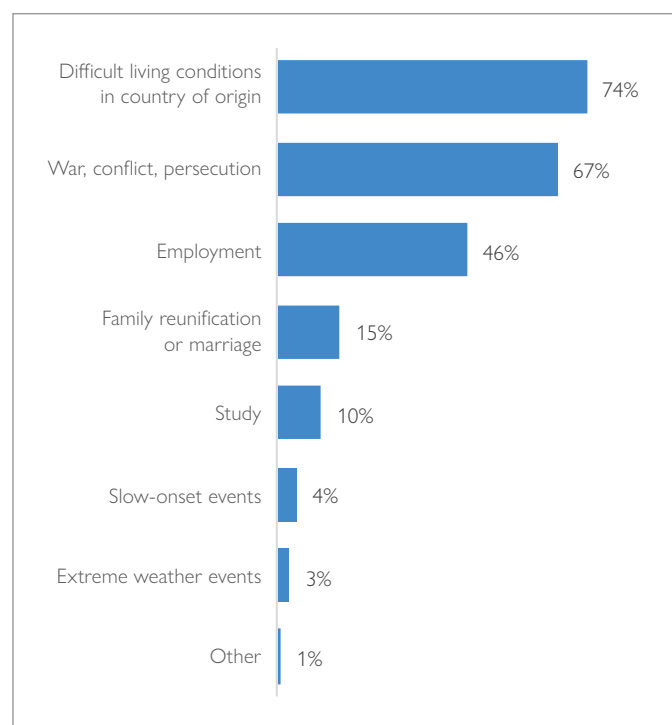
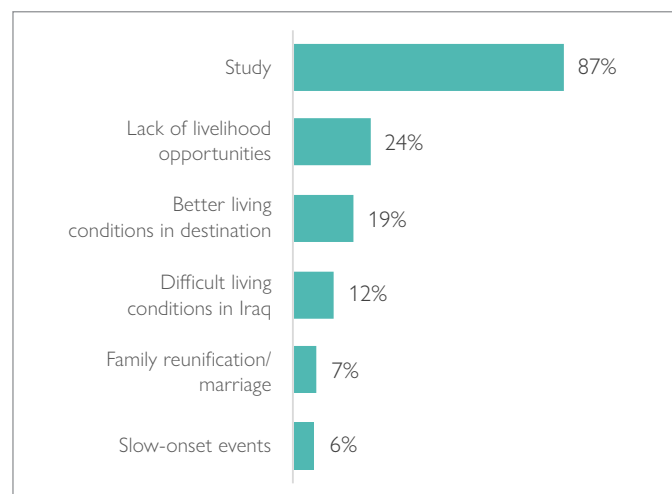


Figure 5: Main reasons for leaving Iraq (outgoing potential emigrants) (multiple answers permitted) (n = 15)

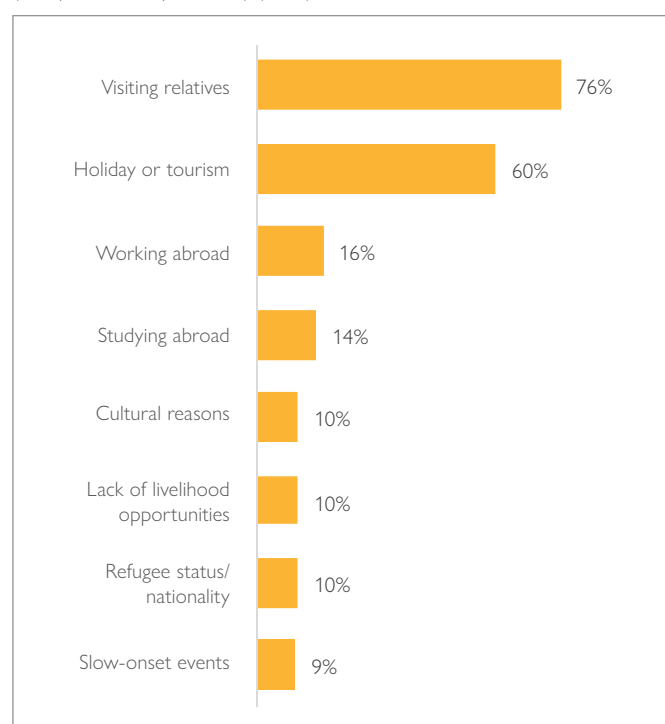


Concerning emigrants who have already established themselves abroad, key drivers for migration involved difficult living conditions in Iraq, including access to services and adequate housing (74%); war, conflict and persecution (67%); and employment (46%). A further 15 per cent

left Iraq for family reunification or marriage, while 10 per cent emigrated to study. A minority of respondents mentioned slow-onset events (4%) or extreme weather events (3%). These findings align with previous studies on migration aspirations, which highlight the strong (although understudied) effects of violence/insecurity and dissatisfaction with public services on desires to migrate.⁵⁰

Among outgoing potential emigrants, the primary reason for leaving Iraq was study (87%), followed by a lack of livelihood opportunities (24%) and the prospect of better living conditions in the intended destination country (19%). A minority (6%) flagged slow-onset events as their reason for leaving.

Figure 6: Main reasons for being outside Iraq (incoming potential emigrants) (multiple answers permitted) (n = 8)



With respect to incoming potential emigrants who were outside Iraq for at least three months, visiting relatives (76%) and holiday or tourism (60%) were cited as the primary reasons for being abroad. Additionally, 16 per cent left Iraq to work abroad and 14 per cent to study abroad. Other factors relate to the security, economic, cultural and environmental situation in Iraq. Specifically, 10 per cent of respondents sought refugee status, went abroad to look for a job or left due to the culture and customs in Iraq. A similar share (9%) cited slow-onset events.

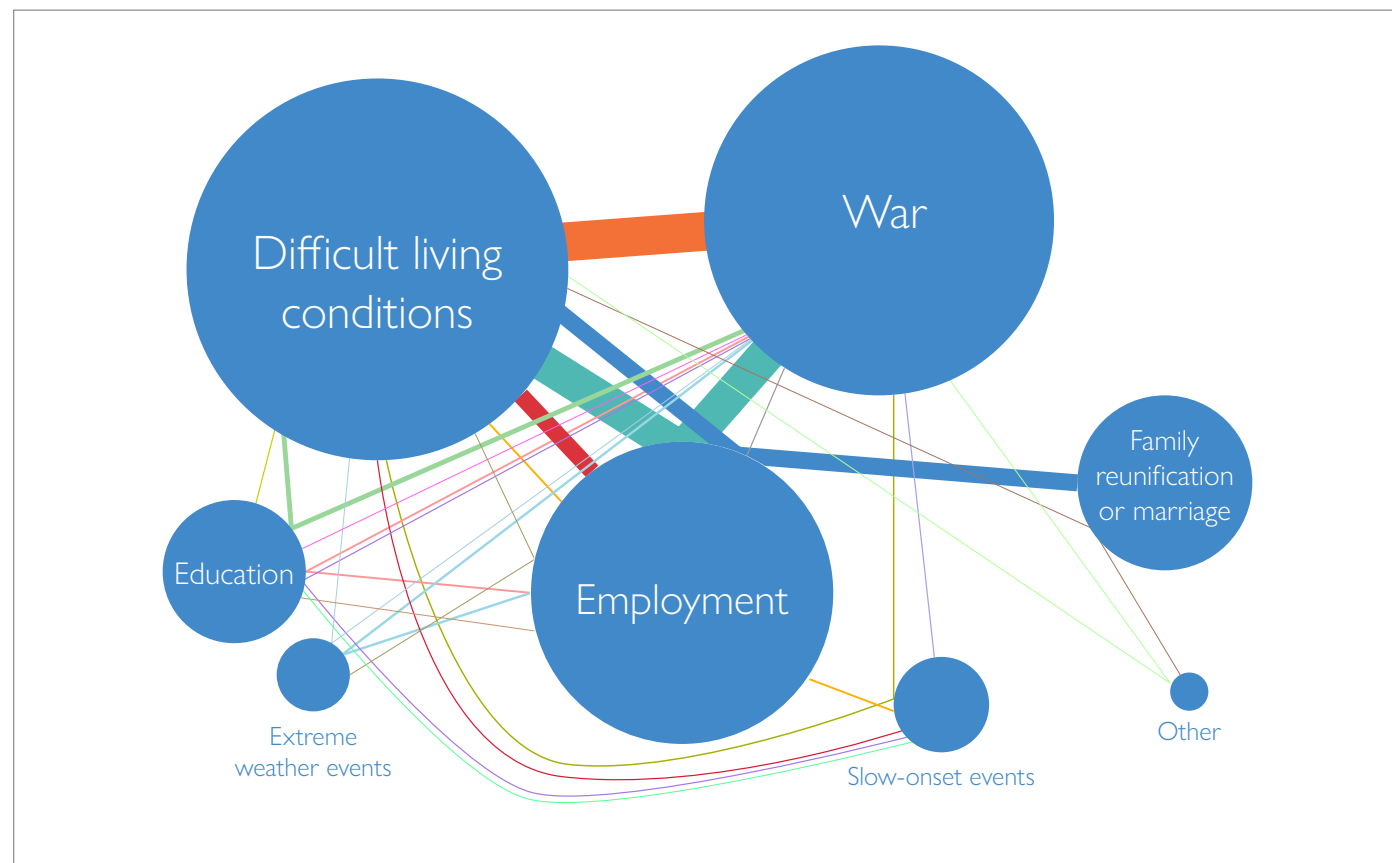
When asked about their reasons for migrating, FGD participants highlighted the challenge of low-paying jobs and their desire for a better future. While participants worked, their incomes were not enough to support their families or even themselves. A participant explained, "The reason I wanted to migrate was that my income was insufficient; it wouldn't last until the end of the month, and I had no other sources of support." Similarly, the desire for a better future was framed in terms of economic stability and the capacity to support their current or future family. A participant illustrates the importance of earning enough money to get married and provide for his future children:

"If you think about it, there is no place better than here [Iraq], but we have no future. We want to go abroad to secure our future. When we start a family, we don't want to feel ashamed if we can't afford something, like borrowing money to buy medicine for our kids. Everyone my age thinks this way. They believe that if they get married tomorrow, they should have some financial stability. No one will give their daughter to someone who has no money or job."

Other FGD participants left Iraq to seek medical treatment. As described by a participant, "My problem is with my leg. A person without functional legs and hands has no future. It's different from other illnesses. No one will employ you. My future and treatment prospects lie abroad." Thus, even non-economic reasons for leaving appear to be influenced by available livelihood opportunities.

INTERCONNECTED DRIVERS OF OUTMIGRATION

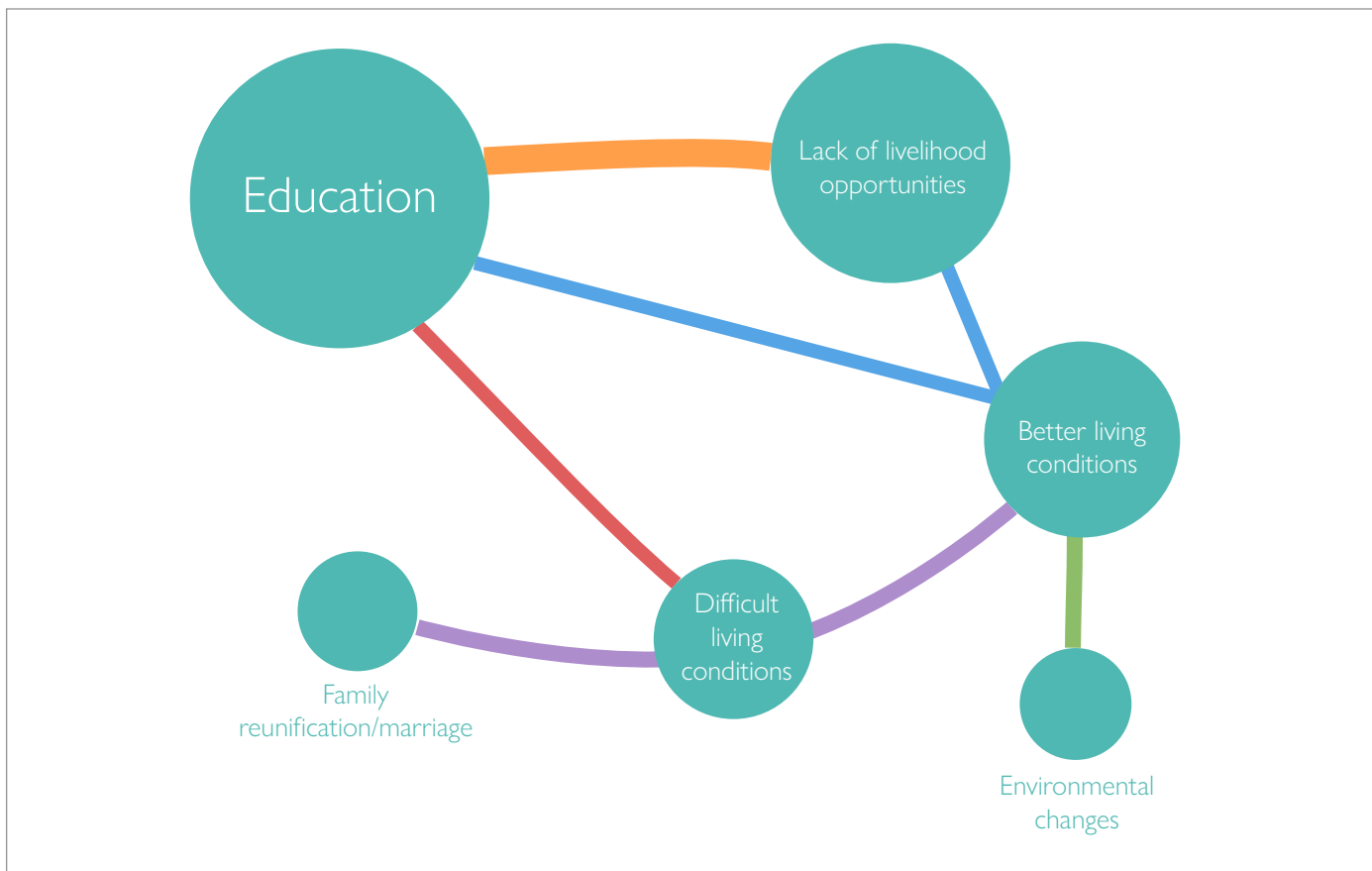
Figure 7: Interconnected drivers of migration for emigrants (n = 282) (bubble size is proportional to the size of each group)



Respondents were able to select up to three reasons for leaving Iraq. With respect to emigrants, the most common combinations of reasons tended to involve difficult living conditions; war, conflict and persecution; and employment. This likely reflects the consequences of war on both living conditions and job opportunities. For example, a longitudinal study of Iraqi nationals displaced by the ISIL conflict found that even five years after displacement, the share of IDPs able to meet their basic needs had not reached pre-displacement levels.⁵¹ Moreover, after displacement, engagement in informal work significantly increased, resulting in greater economic instability.⁵²

Regarding environmental factors, those who cited extreme weather events and slow-onset events also pointed to difficult living conditions; employment; and war, conflict and persecution. Environmental hazards may exacerbate already challenging living conditions, impact the viability of certain occupations like agriculture and serve as another stressor or source of tension in the context of war.⁵³ These findings support the understanding of environmental migration as 'multi-causal phenomenon,' whereby environmental factors interact with the broader security, economic and social landscape to influence migration decision-making.^{54, 55}

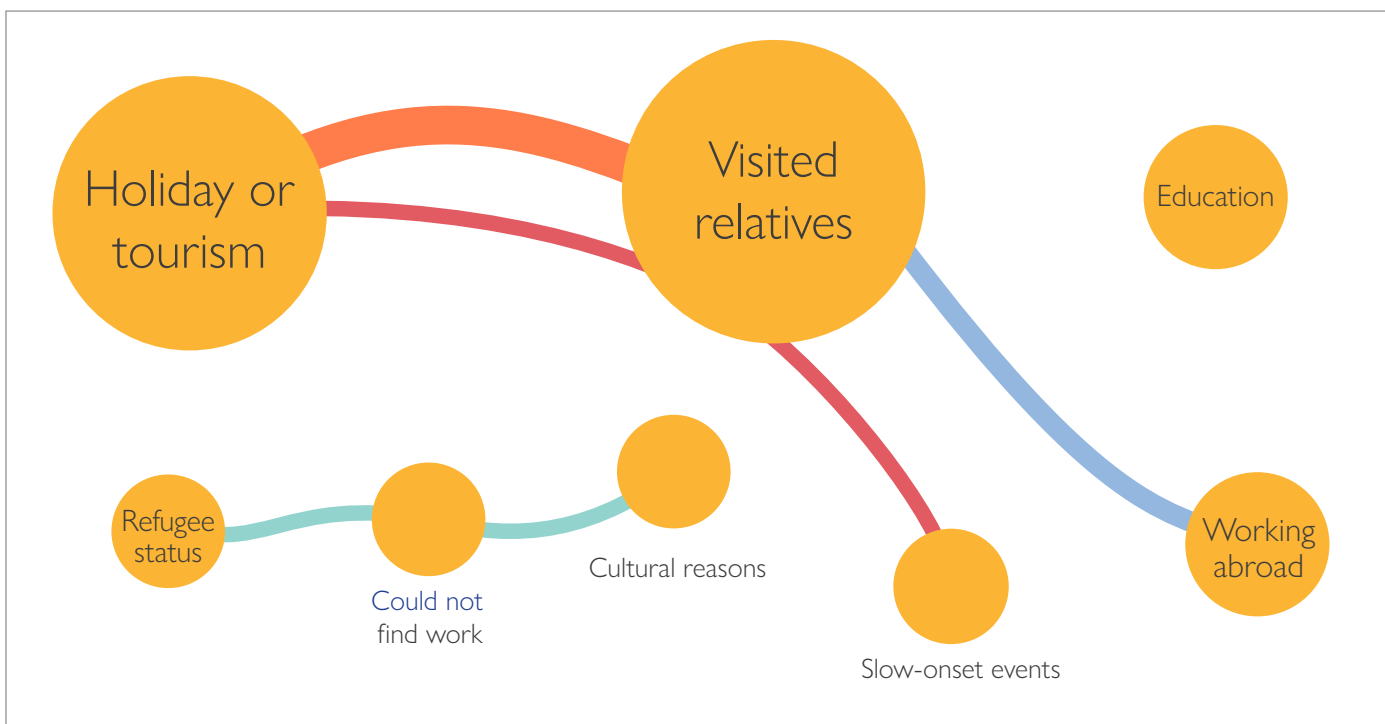
Figure 8: Interconnected drivers of migration for outgoing potential emigrants (n = 15)



For outgoing potential emigrants, the most common combination of reasons included study and lack of livelihood opportunities. In these cases, education may represent a path to obtain higher paying livelihood opportunities or a means to access job markets abroad. Additionally, the pursuit of better living conditions abroad, experience of difficult living conditions in Iraq and family reunification/marriage were often mentioned together. Here, family

reunification/marriage likely serves as the legal basis for migrating (i.e. the capability to migrate), while a desire for better living conditions heightens aspirations to leave Iraq. With respect to environmental factors, slow-onset events tended to be mentioned alongside a desire for better living conditions. Climate change and environmental degradation may worsen living conditions inside Iraq, motivating some to migrate abroad.

Figure 9: Interconnected drivers of migration for incoming potential emigrants (n = 8)



Regarding incoming potential emigrants, those who left Iraq to visit relatives also mentioned taking holidays or working abroad. For this group, slow-onset events, holidays or tourism and visiting relatives were

a common combination of drivers. In these cases, visiting relatives abroad as a tourist may enable respondents to temporarily escape the increasingly extreme heat of Iraqi summers.^{56, 57}

DRIVERS OF MIGRATION BY GOVERNORATE OF ORIGIN

Across all respondents, the top governorates of origin included Baghdad (21%), Ninewa (20%), Duhok (18%) and Erbil (13%). Similar shares of emigrants originated from these governorates. For potential emigrants, other common governorates of origin included Wassit (12%) and Babil (10%).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) (Duhok, Erbil and Al Sulaymaniyah), emigration was driven by difficult living conditions and employment-related factors (Figure 10). Other common drivers for respondents from these governorates included family reunification or marriage and war, conflict and persecution (especially for those from Al-Sulaymaniyah).

Moreover, emigrants who originated from north-central governorates like Al Anbar, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala mainly left due to war, conflict and persecution and difficult living conditions in Iraq. Additionally, respondents from Diyala emigrated to study. Moreover, employment was a key driver for emigrants from Salah al-Din and Kirkuk. With respect to environmental factors, extreme weather events were mentioned among those from Salah al-Din and Ninewa, while slow-onset events were cited in Al Anbar and Salah al-Din.

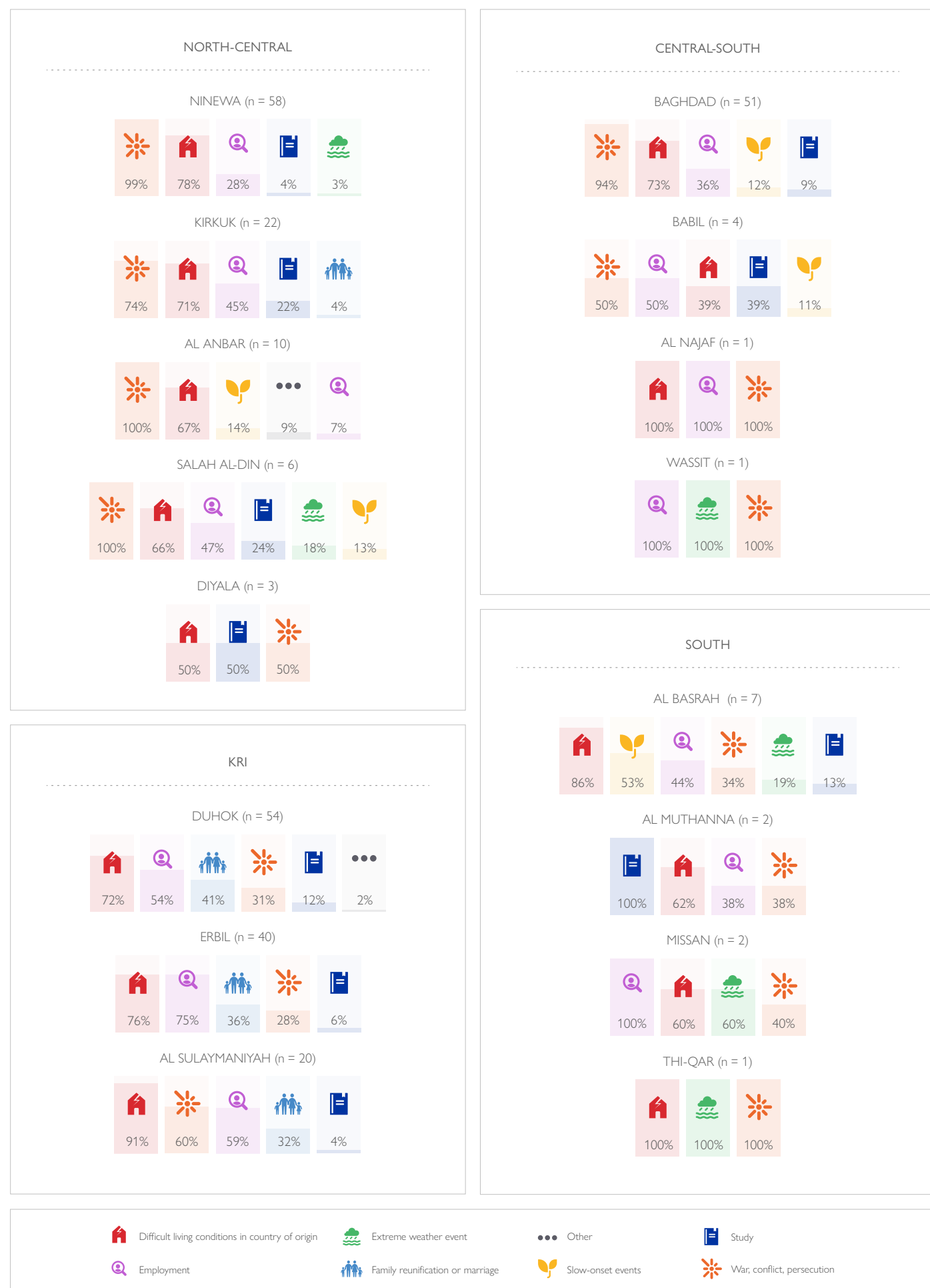
Within central-southern Iraq (Baghdad, Babil, Al Najaf and Wassit), war, conflict and persecution; difficult living conditions; and employment were the main drivers of emigration, with some variations. For example, those from Babil also emigrated for their studies. Respondents from Wassit highlighted extreme weather events, while those from Baghdad and Babil noted slow-onset events.

Finally, emigrants from southern Iraq (Al Basrah, Al Muthanna, Missan and Thi-Qar) pointed to difficult living conditions; employment; and war, conflict and persecution. In Missan, employment represented a more significant driver than war, conflict and persecution, while the opposite was true in Thi-Qar. Environmental drivers were also more pronounced among those from southern Iraq. Respondents from Thi-Qar, Missan and Al Basrah cited extreme weather events, while those from Al Basrah also mentioned slow-onset events.

Outgoing potential emigrants from Al Najaf, Ninewa and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq left exclusively for education. Those originating from Wassit cited both education and a lack of livelihood opportunities as their reasons for leaving. Among outgoing potential emigrants coming from Baghdad and Babil, education remained the top driver, albeit alongside other factors. In the case of Baghdad, this included better living conditions and slow-onset events. In Babil, other drivers concerned a lack of livelihood opportunities and living conditions. Finally, those originating from Diyala pointed to living conditions and family reunification or marriage.

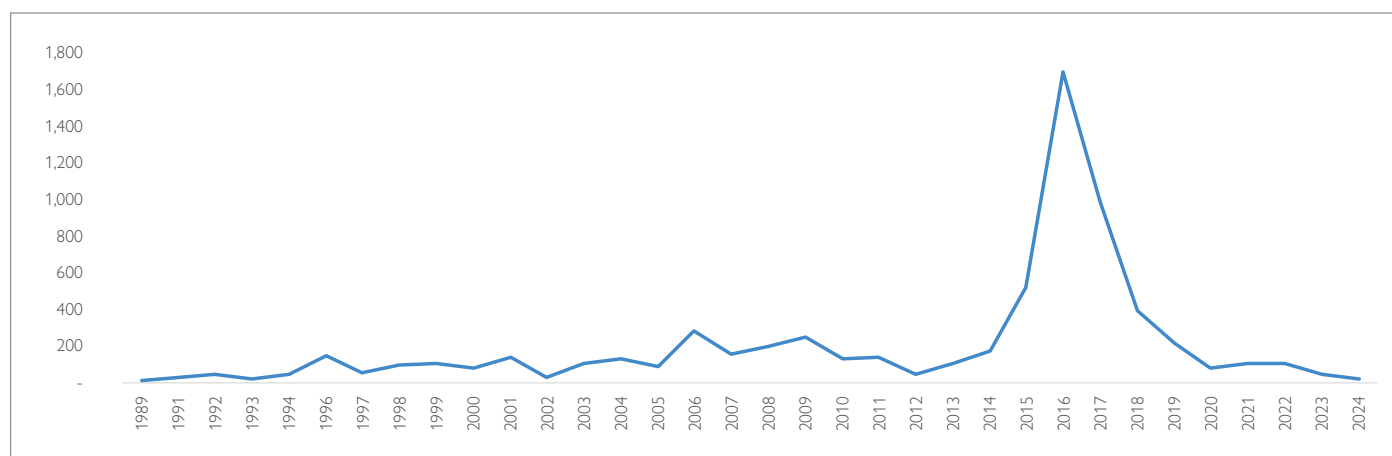
With respect to incoming potential emigrants, those from Al Anbar left to visit relatives or for tourism, while respondents from Baghdad and Ninewa highlighted a wider range of factors. For incoming potential emigrants from Baghdad, visiting relatives and tourism remained the top reasons, alongside working abroad and slow-onset events. On the other hand, those from Ninewa left to study abroad, in addition to visiting relatives and tourism. Beyond this, respondents from Ninewa left to claim refugee status and find work abroad. Cultural reasons were another cited driver.

Figure 10: Reasons for leaving Iraq by governorate of origin (emigrants) (multiple options permitted)



TIME TRENDS

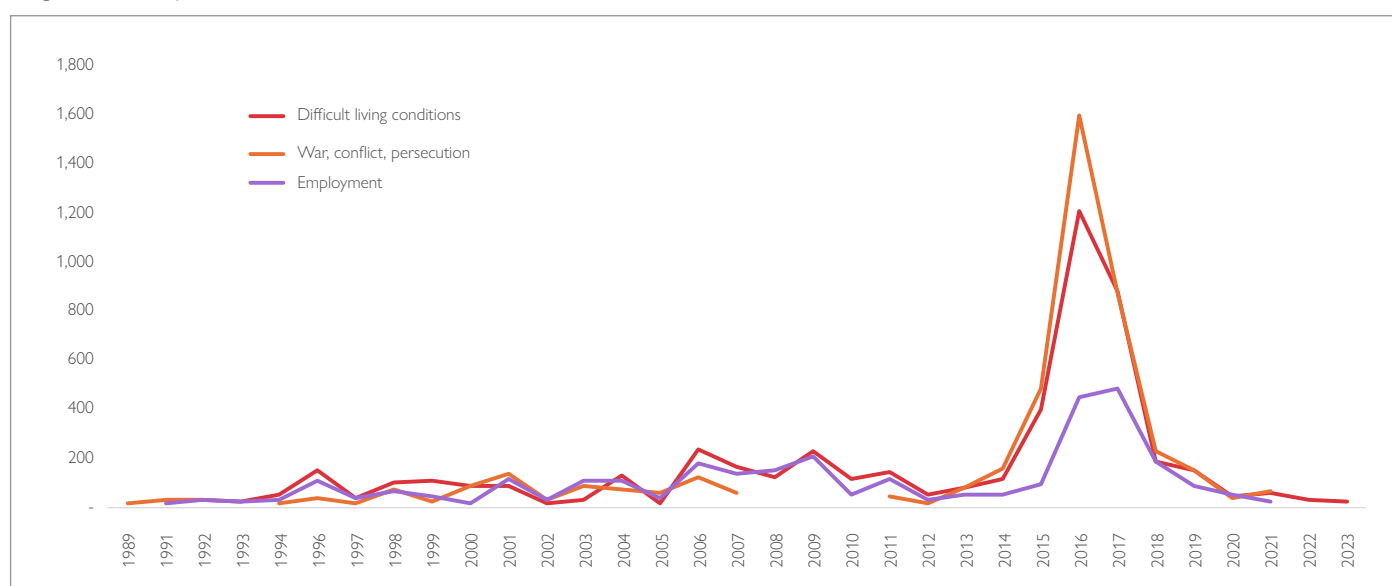
Figure 11: Year of departure among emigrants (n = 282, y-axis shows weighted estimates)



Just under half of surveyed emigrants (49%) left the country during the years corresponding to the 2014–2017 conflict with ISIL. Within this period, half of emigrants left in 2016, along with 29 per cent in 2017. A further 15 per cent left in 2015.

Before this period, outflows increased slightly between 2006 and 2008, corresponding to a period of increased sectarian violence in Iraq.

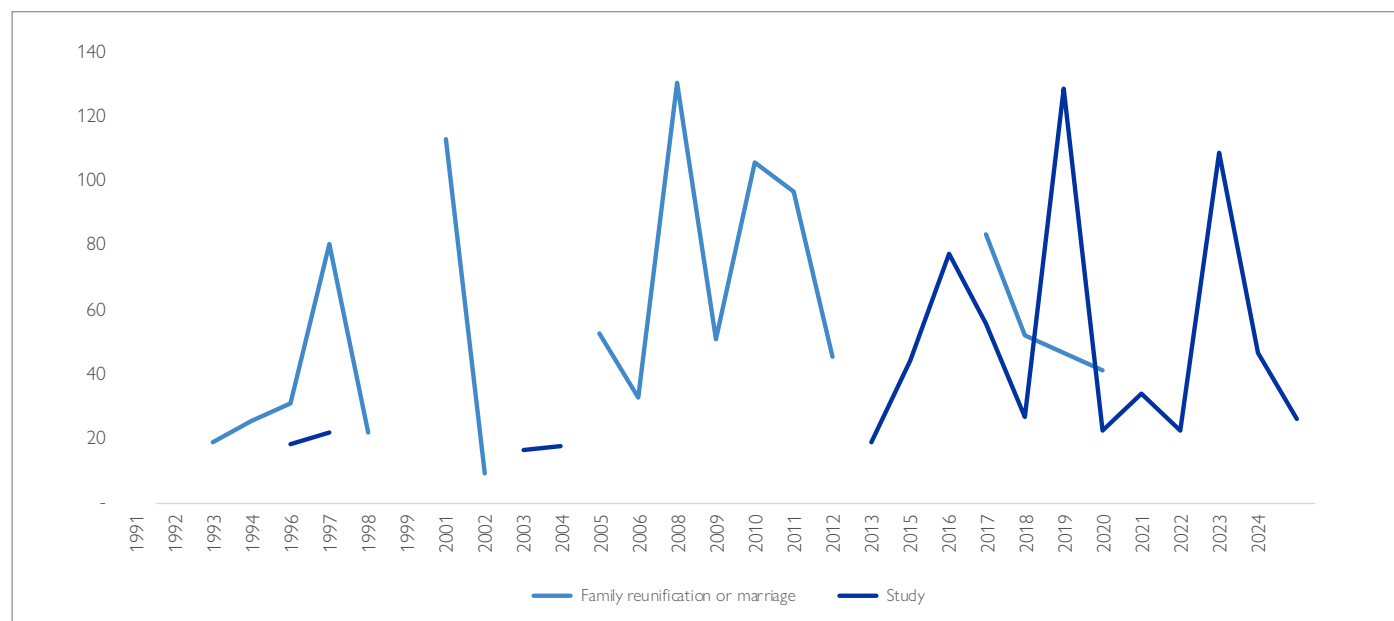
Figure 12: Year of departure for Iraqi emigrants leaving due to difficult living conditions; war, conflict and persecution; and employment (n = 263, y-axis shows weighted estimates)



Emigration linked to war, difficult living conditions and, to a lesser extent, employment peaked between 2014 and 2017. A slight increase in emigration due to employment and difficult living conditions can also be

observed between 2006 and 2009, potentially reflecting challenges linked to the sectarian conflict in the country.

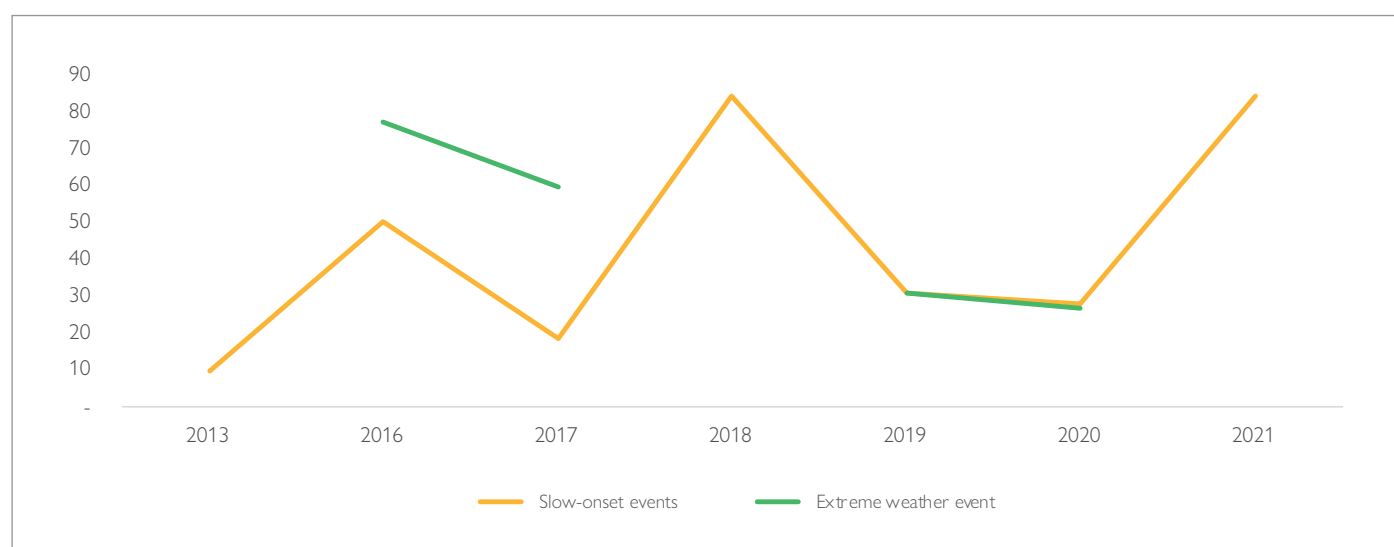
Figure 13: Year of departure for Iraqi emigrants leaving for family reunification or marriage and study (n = 70, y-axis shows weighted estimates)



In contrast, family reunification and marriage were more common drivers prior to 2011, especially in 1996, 1999, 2006, 2009 and 2010. By contrast, emigrants leaving for study largely left since 2015, with peak years including

2015, 2018 and 2022. The years 2018 and 2022 may reflect a rebound effect, whereby respondents who wanted to study abroad but could not leave, either due to conflict or the COVID-19 pandemic, were then able to do so.⁵⁸

Figure 14: Year of departure for Iraqi emigrants leaving due to slow-onset events and extreme weather events (n = 19, y-axis shows weighted estimates)



Emigrants who cited slow-onset events largely left from 2016 onwards, especially in 2016, 2018 and 2021 (16%, 28% and 28%, respectively). Individuals who mentioned extreme weather events also left beginning in 2016. Just under three quarters of this group emigrated in 2016 (40%) or 2017 (31%). According to the Emergency Events Database, the main extreme weather events occurring in 2017, 2019 and 2020 included floods, storms and earthquakes.⁵⁹ These findings generally correspond to the trends observed in the DTM Climate-Induced Displacement Tracking in Iraq, which is backdated to 2016.⁶⁰ Internal climate-induced displacement rose in 2016, 2018 and 2021 before spiking in 2022 and 2023.⁶¹ One possible explanation for the earlier international migration trends is that those who had the means to leave the country chose to do so at an earlier stage than those who lacked these means and were displaced internally.

REASON FOR MIGRATING BY INTENDED DESTINATION

Emigrants have primarily settled in Türkiye (59%) but also in more distant destinations like Germany (15%) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (13%).

Outgoing potential emigrants mainly intended to travel to Türkiye (83%) and, to a lesser extent, the Islamic Republic of Iran (10%) and Cyprus (7%). Similarly, potential emigrants returning to Iraq came from Türkiye (100%). However, Türkiye may serve as a transit country for potential emigrants seeking to reach Europe, given its strategic position along the Eastern Mediterranean Route.^{62, 63}

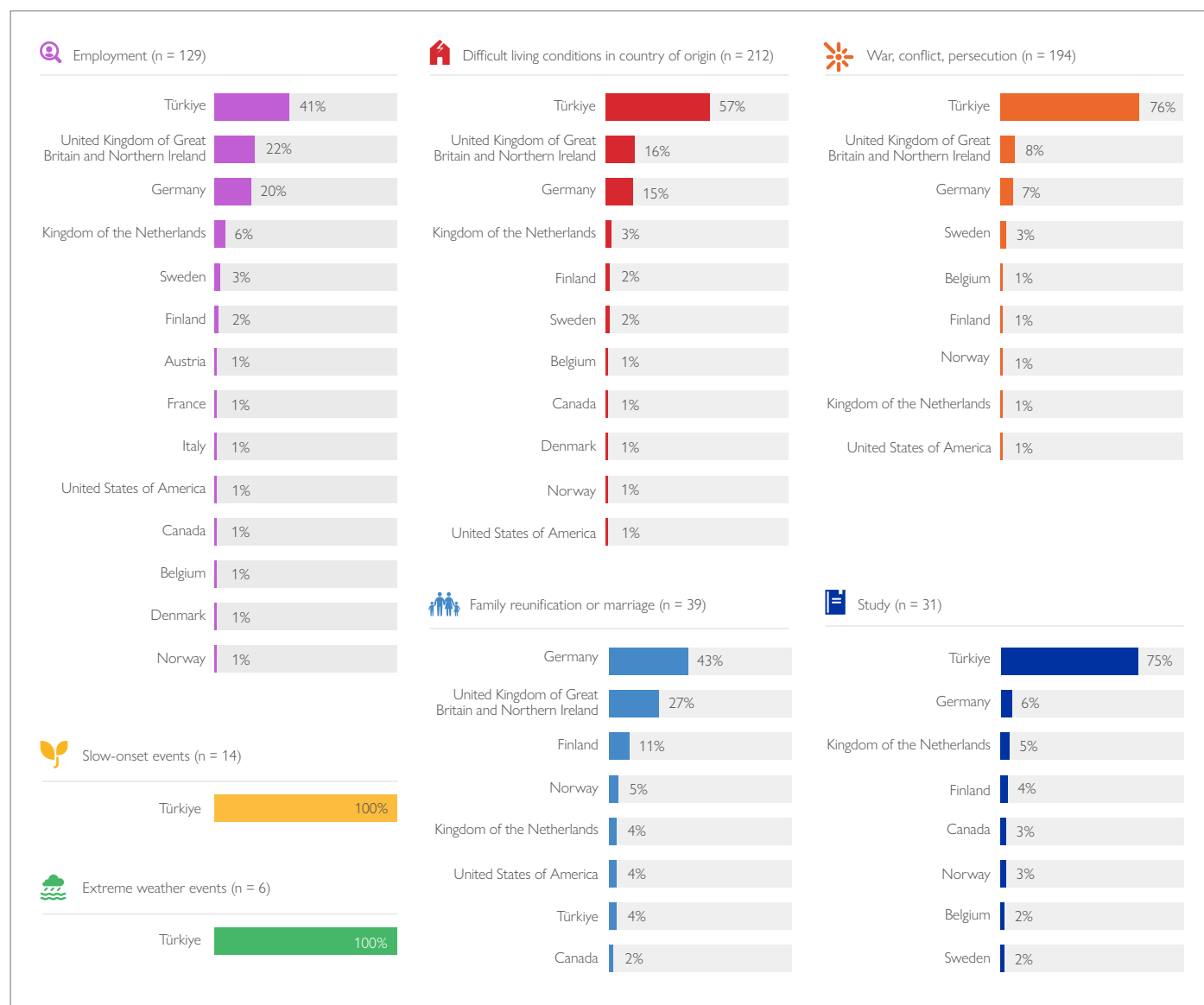
The FGD participants tended to base their choice of destination on the presence of family or friends in the receiving country. Additionally, perceptions of the lifestyle and job opportunities in the destination country influenced their plans.

Emigrants who left Iraq due to war, conflict and persecution; study or environmental factors largely resettled in Türkiye (77%). On the other hand, those who cited difficult living conditions and employment primarily resettled in Türkiye (57% and 41%, respectively) but also the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (16% and 22%, respectively) and Germany (15% and 20%, respectively). Moreover, emigrants who left for family reunification or marriage mainly resettled in European countries, especially Germany (43%), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (27%) and Finland (11%).

Environmental factors were only cited by emigrants who resettled in Türkiye.

Outgoing potential emigrants who left due to a lack of livelihood opportunities, difficult living conditions in Iraq, better living conditions abroad, family reunification or marriage and slow-onset events intended to reach Türkiye. Those travelling for study primarily intended to reach Türkiye but also the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to the small sample size (n = 15), findings for this group should be treated as indicative only.

Figure 15: Country of habitual residence by reason for migrating (emigrants) (n = 282)



IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

This section examines the extent and degree to which extreme weather events and slow-onset events have negatively impacted respondents' area of habitual residence. Considering the small sample of potential emigrants, these results should be interpreted with caution due to reduced statistical power and representativeness. Findings should be confirmed by follow-up assessments with larger samples.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Figure 16: Extreme weather events which negatively impacted emigrants' area of habitual residence in the past three months (multiple options permitted) (n = 282)

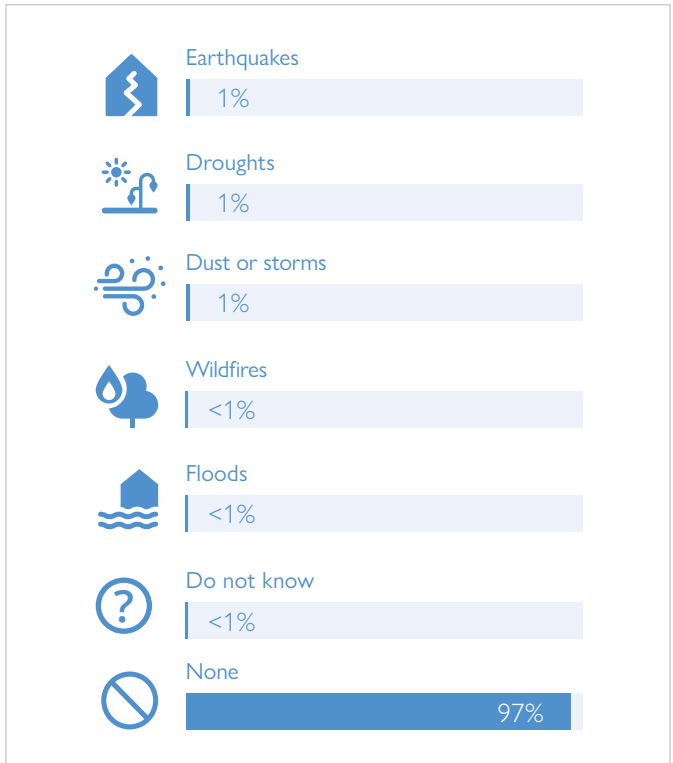
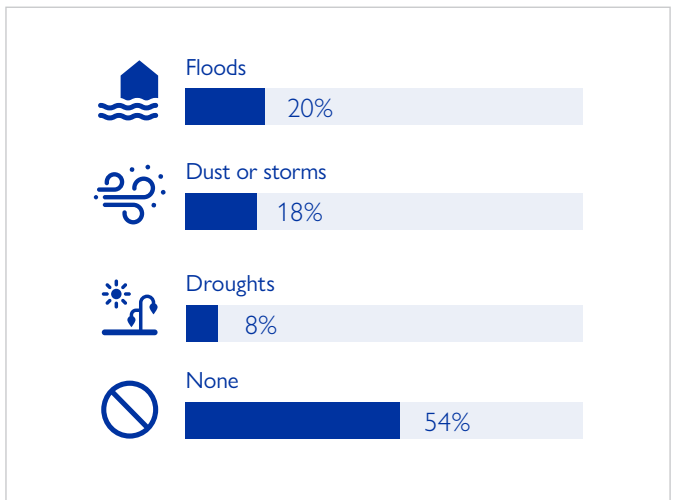


Figure 17: Extreme weather events which negatively impacted potential emigrants' area of habitual residence in the past three months (multiple options permitted) (n = 23)



The survey asked respondents whether any extreme weather events had negatively affected their area of habitual residence in the past three months. Assessed events included drought, dust or sand storms, floods, landslides, wildfires, earthquakes or other hazards.

Among emigrants, only 3 per cent reported an extreme weather event in the past three months which negatively impacted their area of habitual residence. However, emigrants may have already resettled abroad within this time frame. By contrast, 46 per cent of potential emigrants reported an extreme weather event, especially floods, dust or sandstorms and drought.

SLOW-ONSET EVENTS

Figure 18: Slow-onset events which negatively affected emigrants' area of habitual residence in the past five years (multiple options permitted) (n = 282)

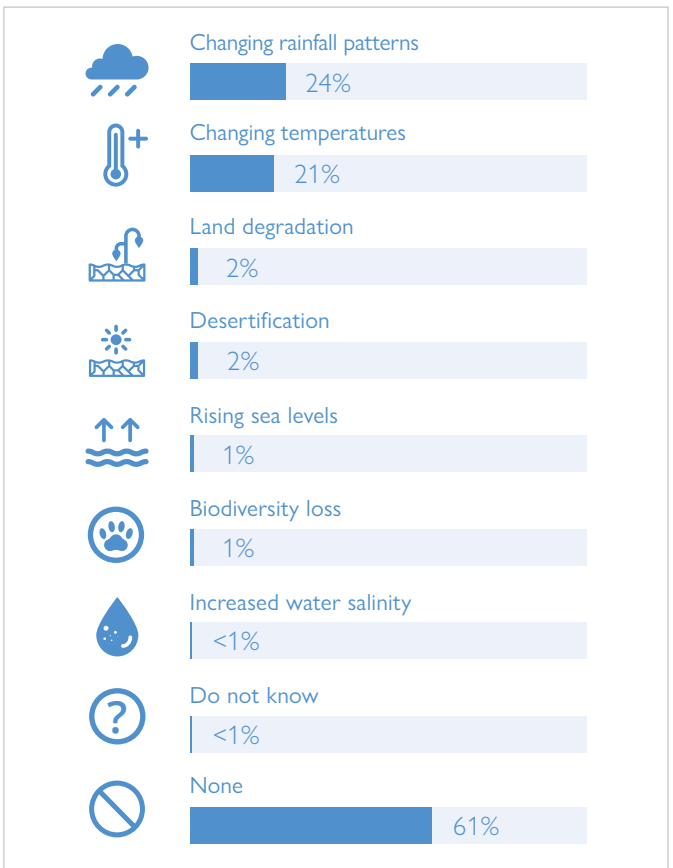
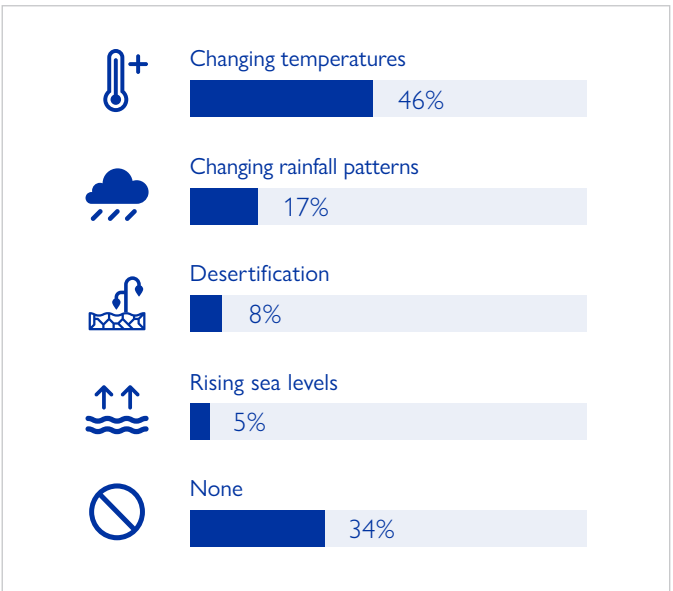


Figure 19: Slow-onset events which negatively affected potential emigrants' area of habitual residence in the past five years (multiple options permitted) (n = 23)



Additionally, negative impacts from slow-onset events within the past five years were also considered. Events assessed included increased water salinity, desertification, increased temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, land degradation, biodiversity loss, rising sea levels or other events.

Around two in five emigrants reported slow-onset events impacting their area of habitual residence in the past five years. Additionally, just under two thirds of potential emigrants indicated such events. The most commonly reported events among both groups were changing temperatures and changing rainfall patterns.

DEGREE OF IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Figure 20: Impact of environmental events on emigrants' living conditions in their area of habitual residence (n = 282)

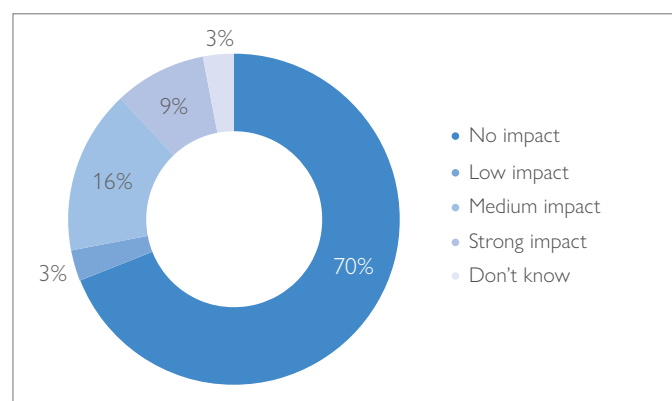
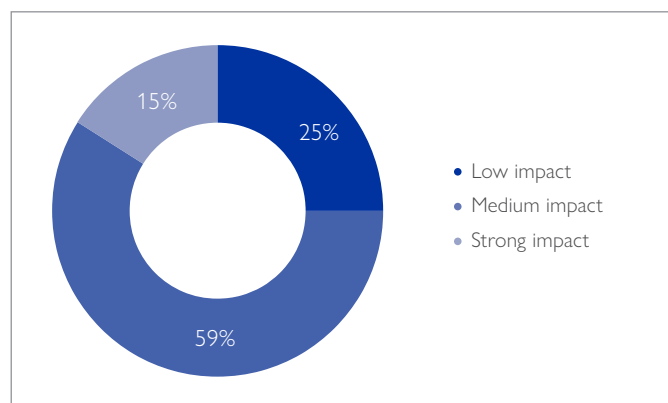


Figure 21: Impact of environmental events on potential emigrants' living conditions in their area of habitual residence (n = 23)



Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Those who reported adverse impacts from either an extreme weather event or slow-onset event were asked to rank the extent to which these events negatively affected their family's living conditions in their area of habitual residence.

Among emigrants who experienced either an extreme weather or slow-onset event, 70 per cent reported no impact on their living conditions. A quarter reported either a medium or strong impact (16% and 9%, respectively). On the other hand, three quarters of potential emigrants who experienced such an event ranked the impact as medium or high (59% or 15%, respectively). A further quarter indicated low impact from the event (25%).

MIGRATION HISTORY

Figure 22: Previous migration history among emigrants (n = 282)

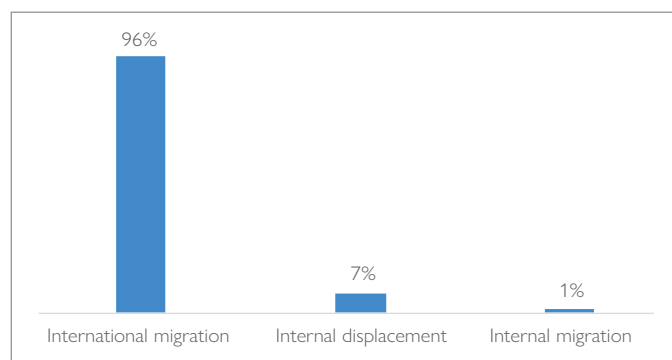
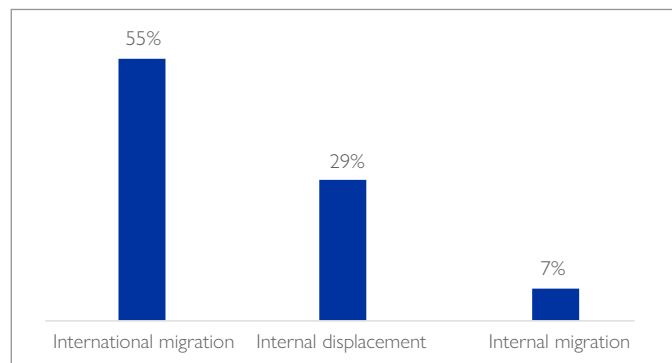


Figure 23: Previous migration history among potential emigrants (n = 23)



In a systematic review of the determinants of migration aspirations, Aslany et al. (2021) found past experiences of migration or travel abroad to be strongly and consistently associated with aspirations to migrate.⁶⁴ Consistent with this finding, around half (55%) of potential emigrants had previously migrated internationally for at least three months. However, only a small minority of emigrants (1%) and potential emigrants (7%) had previously migrated within Iraq.

Regarding past experiences of internal displacement, only 7 per cent of emigrants were internally displaced within Iraq prior to migrating. However, this share was considerably higher for potential emigrants (29%). Among emigrants who were internally displaced, nearly two thirds were displaced in either 2014 or 2015 (44% and 19%, respectively). Other key years for internal displacement included 1990 (during the First Gulf War) and 2003 (during the intervention led by the United States of America). With respect to potential emigrants, around half were displaced in 2014 and 2015 (41% and 15%, respectively). A further quarter (26%) were displaced in 2003, followed by a fifth (18%) in 2009.

Among those internally displaced, the top governorates of origin include Ninewa (44%) and Al Anbar (22%). In Ninewa, these displacements primarily occurred in 2014 and 2015. In Al Anbar, these displacements took place slightly earlier between 2003 and 2009 and between 2012 and 2014.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the drivers of migration from Iraq, as well as the relationship between different drivers. It also considers the potential impact of climate change and environmental degradation on migration patterns. Key drivers of outmigration include a lack of livelihood opportunities, security concerns, difficult living conditions and, among potential emigrants, the pursuit of educational opportunities. Additionally, war, conflict and persecution; difficult living conditions and employment tended to be mentioned in combination. Among those who cited environmental factors, other drivers related to employment, security and living conditions were also noted, underscoring the multi-causal nature of environmental migration. Moreover, considerable shares of emigrants and potential emigrants indicated that slow-onset events negatively impacted their areas of habitual residence and their family's living conditions. Given the wide scope of emigration drivers observed, programming aiming to address the adverse conditions contributing to emigration should range from peace and stabilization efforts to strengthened service provision and enhanced working conditions.

The small number of potential new emigrants surveyed suggests that population outflows through the three monitored border crossing points were low during the study period, compared to visits by established emigrants and to the overall volume of travellers. Given the limited duration of data collection for this assessment, it is recommended to continue monitoring these trends over a longer timeframe, with an aim to increase the sample size. Considering the seasonal dimension of internal climate-induced displacement, future assessments should cover at least one year. This is particularly important during the summer months, when extreme heat may drive more people to leave.

Future studies may focus on specific drivers, such as persecution, employment or difficult living conditions. Cross-Border Monitoring data can also be used to develop migration aspiration surveys based on the top governorates and districts of origin.

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