

## 2.15.3. Christians

### COMMON ANALYSIS

Last updated: June 2022

### COI summary

[[Targeting 2022](#), 4.1, 4.1.1, 4.1.2]

Following the US-led invasion in March 2003, the Cristian population in Iraq has declined from approximately 1 500 000 to less than 250 000: the Christian community in Iraq comprises 14 official recognised sects, the most prominent of which are Chaldean Catholics (67 % of all Christians), Assyrians (20 %), Syriacs (10 %), Armenians (approximate 3 %).

After the US-led military intervention, Iraqi Christians have been suffering from persecution and discrimination. Most Christians in Iraq had already fled before the 2014 ISIL advance. The ISIL occupation of Ninewa Plain in 2014 led to a massive exodus, as ISIL militants killed thousands of civilians and destroyed religious sites in their attempt of religious cleansing of the population and public spaces. Following ISIL's defeat in 2017, Christian have gradually begun to return, but at a low rate mainly due to fear by local and Shia militias that control the territory.

While ISIL is considered to be defeated in Iraq, there are reports of an increased level of violence committed against Christians in 2020 who continued to be targeted by attacks and kidnappings.

The PMF prevented the return of many displaced Christians as part of their attempt to induce demographic changes and secure illegal economic benefits. In the outskirts of Mosul and in the Ninewa Plains, Shia militia seized large areas of residential, business and agricultural lands in the traditionally Christian regions with the help of officials. Local militias limited the movement of Christian IDPs by setting up checkpoints, imposing illegal taxes for business owners and refusing to

return the properties that were occupied during the war.

In the cities of Batnaya and Tal Kayf, the PMF puts Christians at a disadvantage when it comes to buying property by imposing illegal approvals and bribes. Furthermore, Christians from the town of Tal Kayf have complained about the ISF intimidating them by running searches, imposing movement restrictions and using some of their houses without offering compensations.

Harassment and intimidation against Christians by the PMF reportedly continued in the Ninewa Plain in 2020, particularly in the cities of Bartella, Bazwiya, and Bashiq. They were reported to impose traffic restrictions in and between Christian-populated towns in the Ninewa Plains. It was also reported that PMF members attacked two Christians at Bartella main checkpoint and threatened via social media Christian priests who spoke against them. Furthermore, there is information that the PMF detained 1 000 people in secret facilities in Ninewa province on false religious motives and engaged in extortion, illegal arrests, kidnappings, and the detention of people without warrants. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, reportedly harassed Christian families in Bartella under false pretext by running investigations against them and trying to convince them to leave the city.

It was also reported that more than 14 Christian and Yazidi-owned liquor stores were attacked in Baghdad, in 2020. Some Iraqi Christian business owners claimed that Shia Iran-backed militia members bombed their stores.

Although one of the representatives of Christians in the Iraqi parliament signalled an improvement of the situation of Christians in 2020, the Christian community complained about the general treatment by Shia militias that disadvantaged them in terms of real estate purchases, trade opportunities and free movement.

Christians have been reported to be socially pressured to withhold from celebrating religious feasts overlapping with the Islamic holidays like Ramadan or Ashura. Also, Christian women have been reported to be harassed for not following the Islamic practice of wearing the hijab.

In terms of access to education, the KRG operates 49 schools in which Syriac is the used language and the public education system provides Christian education for children. The KRG supported the health and education of Christians by funding the construction of churches, hospitals and schools, especially in Erbil. However, even though Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan Region have better living opportunities than in other parts of Iraq, they still face discrimination in terms of land disputes

and property issues as they were subjected to expropriations for different reasons.

With regard to conversion, see [2.14 Individuals considered to have committed blasphemy and/or apostasy](#).

## **Risk analysis**

The acts to which individuals under this profile could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. killing, rape, abduction, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention). In other cases, individuals could be exposed to (solely) discriminatory measures, and the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.

Not all individuals under this profile would face the level of risk required to establish a well-founded fear of persecution. The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: area of origin (e.g. Christians in areas where ISIL continues to operate are at higher risk; risk is lower in KRI), gender, etc.

## **Nexus to a reason for persecution**

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of religion.



See other topics concerning minorities:

- [Overview](#)
- [2.15.1. Turkmen](#)
- [2.15.2. Yazidis](#)
- [2.15.3. Christians](#)
- [2.15.4. Shabak](#)
- [2.15.5. Kaka'i](#)
- [2.15.6. Sabeen-Mandaeans](#)
- [2.15.7. Baha'i](#)
- [2.15.8. Bidoon](#)

- [2.15.9. Fayli Kurds](#)
- [2.15.10. Palestinians](#)

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