

4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

This profile refers to persons with perceived links to ISIL and family members of such persons, as well as civilians who resided in territories previously controlled by ISIL.

COI summary

ISIL is an UN- and EU-designated terrorist organisation. The group began capturing territory in Syria in 2013, which attracted an international US-led coalition military response. Since September 2014, the US-led Global Coalition against ISIL has carried out military operations against ISIL and other targets in Syria [[Actors](#), 1.2.2, p. 6]. The Kurdish-controlled areas in northeast Syria covers most of the territory that was previously under ISIL control in Syria and which sources considered 'the main theatre for ISIS's insurgency' [[Targeting 2020](#), 6.2, p. 61].

ISIL's territorial control and governance in Syria ceased to exist in March 2019. However, according to recent sources, ISIL was reported to 'remain resilient' and to be 'taking advantage of political and military developments' in Syria to regain presence. Among others, ISIL activities were reported in the Kurdish controlled areas [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.6, p. 33].

Between August 2022 and August 2023, the SDF routinely carried out security operations against ISIL cells in territories under their control, which included destroying hideouts, dismantling recruitment and support networks, and confiscating weapons. However, as part of such operations, they also reportedly targeted people opposed to the SDF, conducting home raids, imposing curfews or partial lockdowns and carrying out sweeping arrests. [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3, p. 29]

SDF arrested villagers on suspicion of being ISIL members or having links with ISIL cells during anti-ISIL raids, and reportedly provided no arrest warrants and took detainees to unknown locations. It was noted that raids often caused harm to civilians, including wrongful arrests, due to faulty intelligence [[Security 2022](#), 2.9.3, p. 176]. Cases of kidnapping and civilians being killed were also reported. Some of the detainees were later released, while others remained disappeared. In the aftermath of the ISIL attack on Al-Sinaa prison in Hasaka governorate in January 2022, dozens of local Arab residents were accused of being ISIL members and subjected to arbitrary arrest by the SDF. Women were also targeted by the SDF with detention, among other reasons for being relatives of suspected ISIL members, with the aim of pressuring family members to turn themselves in [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.1, p. 50].

Throughout the AANES territory, the SDF held about 10 000 ISIL fighters in more than 20 detention facilities, the largest of them located in Hasaka city. This vast amount of incarcerated ISIL members

continued to be a source of insecurity [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3, p.29]. Moreover, in north-eastern Syria, SDF continued to detain persons with perceived affiliation to ISIL, including children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 38]. The conditions in prisons for ISIL suspects, both for men and women, were described as ‘dire’, with ‘severely overcrowded cells with open latrines and poor ventilation’ and lacking adequate medical care. Female inmates were reportedly subjected to abusive treatment [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.2, p. 52].

The wives and children of ISIL suspects were taken to displacement camps such as Al-Hol and Al-Roj, characterised by appalling living conditions, limited medical care and food, and with a high rate of violence targeting women and children [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p.38]. Most residents of Al-Hol camp were said to have no connection to ISIL. Still, there were some women and children with family ties to ISIL fighters [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.2, p. 52]. Female ISIL members in Al-Hol camp are also reported to impose ISIL ideology and norms on displaced women and children and to commit acts of violence, including murders, against persons considered to be ISIL opponents [[Targeting 2022](#), 13.3.3, p. 117].

In 2015, the YPG established the terrorism court – known as the ‘People’s Court’ – to prosecute ISIL fighters and affiliates. The court has judges and prosecutors lacking judicial training, who often come from different professional backgrounds, such as architects, construction workers, bakers or auto mechanics. The Kurdish authorities were reported to have tried thousands of Syrian ISIL suspects in flawed proceedings. The Kurdish authorities’ approach to prosecution of ISIL fighters was described as uneven, with some fighters being freed or given light sentences, while other waiting years for a trial. Defence lawyers for cases of ISIL fighters were reportedly not available due to fears of retaliation from ISIL cells. Kurdish authorities handed out reduced sentences to ISIL members who have surrendered to them or released them as part of reconciliation deals brokered with tribal leaders [[Actors](#), 3.1.4, p. 43]. In mid-2020, the Kurdish authorities declared to have brought 8 650 cases to trial and having convicted 1 881 Syrian nationals for association with ISIL, with a further 1 600 detainees awaiting judicial process [[Targeting 2022](#), 3.2, p. 51]. In June 2023, the AANES further announced that it would start trying suspected ISIL fighters who have been in its custody for years [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.3, p.29].

SDF regularly claims to arrest ISIL affiliates, but it has been accused of arresting civil activists involved in the uprising against the Assad government. There were several incidents of arrests of local activists and humanitarian workers in Raqqqa governorate under the accusation of ISIL affiliation. [[Targeting 2020](#), 3.2, p. 41]

YPG forces were reported to be engaged in razing of villages, confiscation of property and forced displacements of people in retaliation for perceived affiliation or sympathies to ISIL or other armed groups during anti-ISIL operations in Hasaka and Raqqqa governorates carried out in 2015. [[Targeting 2020](#), 3.2, p. 41]

Those considered to be affiliated with terrorist groups such as ISIL can be denied entering in reconciliation agreements with the GoS. However, GoS has on several occasions struck deals with the group and participated in the evacuation of its members. In May 2018, ISIL soldiers and their families were evacuated from Yarmouk Camp and Hajar al-Aswad in Damascus to areas that were then under ISIL control in the desert in Badia. [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.3.1, p. 19]

Recent sources also reported several instances where government forces arrested individuals (including women) with relatives who had been affiliated with armed opposition groups such as ISIL. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 19]

The Syrian Penal Code envisages the death penalty for terrorism-related offences, including terrorist acts and the financing of terrorist acts, regardless of whether such acts result in death or not. However, little information is available about death sentences passed and there is no information on executions. [[Actors](#), 2.2.3, p. 20]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

In itself, the prosecution of the criminal acts of the insurgents and their targeting in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law do not amount to persecution. However, acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. enforced disappearance, death penalty, killing).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For persons with perceived links to ISIL and the family members of such persons, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated.

In the case of civilians who resided in territories previously controlled by ISIL, 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, in particular the perceived level of support for ISIL.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

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