

Please cite as: EUAA, '3.2. Sunni Arabs' in *Country Guidance: Iraq*, November 2024.

3.2. Sunni Arabs

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: November 2024

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports and query: Country Focus 2024, 1.2.1; Arab tribes 2023, 4.1; Targeting 2022, 2.1; COI Update 2024, 3.1. Country Guidance should not be referred to as source of COI.

Sunni Arabs are a minority in Iraq but form a majority in the central governorates. Decades of conflict and violence intensified sectarian divisions and mistrust among communities.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Some acts to which Sunni Arabs could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. Reportedly, Sunni Arabs have been subjected to enforced disappearances and killings by militias as well as abuses and torture during (arbitrary) arrest and detention. Detention has also taken place in secret prisons. The government continued to use the Anti-Terrorism Law as a pretext for detaining individuals without due process. Sunni Arabs amount to 90% of all prisoners in Iraq. As of June 2024, UN experts documented 30 executions, noting that '[t]he alleged political use of death sentences, mainly against Sunni Iraqi males, is deeply troubling'.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that Sunni Arabs could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should be also considered. Sunni Arabs have been targeted at checkpoints and have been prevented from returning to their home areas by different actors. Political oppression and extortion by the PMF were also reported as well as verbal harassment. As reported in 2019, Sunnis had also faced discrimination in the context of the de-Baathification process.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The mere fact for an individual to be a Sunni Arab would normally not lead to a well-founded fear of persecution. However, Sunni Arab applicants would be at risk of persecution if perceived to be affiliated with ISIL. **Their perceived affiliation with ISIL would depend on individual circumstances**, such as:

- **Home area:** Sunnis who lived in areas under ISIL's rule have been accused of siding with ISIL by PMF, irrespective of their degree of involvement with the group. The anti-terrorism legislation is reportedly used as a 'pretext' to unlawfully detain Sunni Arabs, especially in Sunni majority governorates such as Anbar, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewa.

  Some Sunni Arab IDPs from certain governorates were reportedly explicitly barred from returning by militias or by the KRG, which has blocked returns in disputed territories and in areas that KRG forces took back from ISIL while Kurdish villagers were allowed to return. In Ninewa, including Mosul, PMF intensified the political oppression and extortion towards Sunni Arabs. In Tal Afar, it appears that fears of violence based on religious affiliation have persisted and Sunnis feel discriminated against for being perceived as ISIL supporters. In Sinjar, tensions between Yazidis and Sunnis were reported. In Mosul, PMF-affiliated groups indiscriminately harass, intimidate, and arrest Sunni civilians. In Al-Jayalah, Al-Khalis district of Diyala governorate, multiple Sunni civilians have been killed by Iran-backed Shia militias in February and March 2023.

- **Age and gender:** Young Sunni men have been accused under the Anti-Terrorism Law on suspicion of having links with ISIL.

- **Political background:** The list of the most wanted ISIL members published by the Iraqi authorities in 2018 included several high-ranking former Baath party members. Tribal background can also affect the perception of political affiliation. For example, Saddam Hussein's tribe, named Albu Nasir, is also reported to face marginalisation due to perceived affiliation with ISIL.

For more details and guidance in case of perceived affiliation with ISIL, see 3.1. Persons perceived to be affiliated with ISIL.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile, this may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion, especially for those affiliated with ISIL. Persecution may also be for reasons of religion, notably in the context of rivalries with the Shia militias. In individual cases, race/ethnicity could also be a relevant ground, as specifically Sunnis have been denied return to some areas by the KRG, while Kurdish persons have been allowed to return.

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu