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3.4. Journalists and media workers

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: November 2024

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports and query: Country Focus 2024, 1.1.2; COI Update 2024, 3.2; Targeting 2022, 5.1, 5.1.2. Country Guidance should not be referred to as source of COI.

The Iraqi Constitution guarantees the freedom of press if it does not violate public order and morality. However, Iraq is regarded as one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Some acts to which journalists and media workers could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. More specifically, anti-defamation crimes included in the Penal Code are often used to threaten, punish and intimidate journalists and a 'considerable' number of Iraqi journalists have faced legal proceedings. Vaguely worded laws have been used to target and silence journalists, including in the KRI. The law on 'misuse of technology, social media and means of communication' has been also used in this regard. In some cases, journalists in the KRI have been detained by the authorities with accusations of espionage. In May 2024, Amnesty International denounced the continued attacks against journalists by KRI authorities, including 'arbitrary detention, beating and grossly unfair trials.'

The Committee to Protect Journalists did not record any murder of journalists in Iraq from January 2022 until March 2024. However, in previous years, journalists have been kidnapped, tortured, and assassinated for their work. The perpetrators are not always clearly identifiable, however attacks in the context of protests have been attributed to security forces and militias.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that journalists and media workers could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should be also considered. Self-censorship is widely spread in Iraq, including in the KRI.

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

For **journalists and media workers who engage in critical reporting on controversial political or other sensitive issues** (e.g. corruption, abuse of authority, protests, poverty, unemployment) **or are seen as criticising government officials, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated**, because they are particularly targeted in Iraq.

For **other journalists and media workers**, the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood to face persecution should take into account **additional risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Political and/or sectarian background:** Journalists considered as ‘enemies’ were directly targeted by all the conflicting parties. Employees of media outlets have been also targeted based on the political affiliation of their employers.

- **Gender:** Female journalists are particularly subject to discrimination, harassment and extortion, especially those working on controversial issues for independent media.

- **Visibility, including being known to the authorities:** Journalists or those with large social media followers perceived to insult Iraqi or Kurdish authorities face serious repercussions. Nevertheless, less prominent journalists have been also targeted as well as journalists in the KRI, especially local and independent reporters.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile, this is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion, as journalists or media workers would be seen as critical of the relevant actor.

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