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4.4. Persons fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces

COMMON ANALYSIS | Last update: December 2025

This profile refers to the topic of recruitment by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)/YPG, and by the 'Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement' (see 3.6. Other actors).

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports and query: COI Update, 4.; Country Focus July 2025, 2.6., Country Focus 2023, 1.4.; Targeting 2022, 5.3.; Targeting 2020, 4.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

While SDF leaders agreed in March 2025 to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the Transitional Government, representatives of Kurdish political and armed groups, including the SDF, collectively rejected the attempt to centralise power in Damascus. At the time of writing, the March 2025 agreement had not yet been implemented.

As a consequence, Kurdish-led forces are still to be considered autonomous until potential new information substantiating their integration in the new Syrian military is available.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

SDF/YPG are non-State armed forces, therefore, non-voluntary recruitment by SDF/YPG is considered as forced recruitment. Forced recruitment and child recruitment are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution.

There are continued cases of children being recruited by the SDF, and the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU). The YPG and Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ) recruited and used boys and girls as young as 12 years old. In 2025, all the cases of child recruitment were attributed to the Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement. Very little information on the background of the children who were recruited was available at the time of writing.

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

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for persons to be forcibly recruited by Kurdish-led forces should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as:

- **Gender and age:** males between 18 and up to 31 years of age face a risk. In June 2019 the Kurdish Administration passed a law about the ‘Duty of Self Defence’, where conscription became mandatory for all male residents of the DAANES territory, including Syrian nationals and stateless Kurds, between 18 and 31 years of age. Women can join the YPJ on a voluntary basis.
- **Ethno-religious background:** Kurds are the primary target. Other ethno-religious groups are less at risk. More precisely, Christians were not subjected to the same level of enforcement of the ‘Duty of Self Defence’ as Kurds. Additionally, DAANES was said to be more cautious in enforcing the ‘Duty of Self Defence’ law in Arab dominated regions.
- **Falling withing an exemption ground:** persons falling under an exemption ground are not at risk, since exemptions are reported to be generally respected. Exemptions to the ‘Duty of Self-Defence’ include medical reasons, disabilities, family members of martyrs holding a proving certificate thereof, or only sons.

In addition to those risk-impacting circumstances, the individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood **for children**, to face persecution, in relation to child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces, should take into account the following **risk-impacting circumstance**:

- **Displacement:** children living in IDP camps face a higher risk. The YPG and YPJ reportedly recruited and used boys and girls from IDP camps in north-eastern Syria.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

While the risk of **forced recruitment** as such may not generally imply a nexus to a reason for persecution, the consequences of refusal, could, depending on individual circumstances, substantiate such a nexus, among other reasons, to **(imputed) political opinion**, as refusing such recruitment would be perceived as a political opinion.

In the case of **child recruitment, the individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated**. For example, in the case of children who refuse to join the Kurdish forces, persecution may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.

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