

2.3.2 Treatment of ethnic and religious minorities

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Decades of conflict and violence have weakened Iraq's historical ethnic and religious diversity, particularly affecting ethno-religious minorities.550 This has led to demographic shifts in areas such as the Ninewa Plains551 and an overall significant decline in minority populations across Iraq,552 although reliable data are lacking.553 Iraq's minority communities, including Yazidis, Chaldeans and Assyrians, Sabean-Mandaeans, Shabak, Turkmen and others, continued to face significant challenges,554 including in the KRI.555 Notwithstanding the recognition of freedom of religion and belief enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution, legislative framework and customs reportedly favour the Muslim majority.556 Iraq's northern Kurdish governorates host the country's largest, though decreasing, minority communities, including Christians, Kaka'is, Shabak, Turkmen and Yazidis. Many reside in disputed territories along the Kurdistan Region's western and southern borders.557 PMF-linked militias continued to target religious minorities with checkpoint harassment, property appropriation, extortion, detention, and torture.558 Hate speech and dissemination of negative stereotypes targeting ethno-religious minority groups (including Roma), people of African descent, stateless persons and non-citizens, both in the media and on the social media, persisted.559 Concerns have also been raised about inadequate political representation in both Iraq and the KRI,560 including within transitional justice institutions.561 Reports also indicate persistent discrimination in education, employment562 and health services.563

Yazidis

Ten years after the ISIL's genocide against the Yazidi community in Sinjar, approximately 2 500 Yazidis remain unaccounted for.564 Despite the 2023 federal budget allocating 25 billion Iraqi dinars [approximately EUR 16.4 million] to support the Yazidi Female Survivors Act (also known as Yazidi Survivors Law – YSL),565 effective disbursement remains limited566 due to difficulties stemming from missing documentation, lack of identification papers, and logistical barriers.567 Although over 600 Yazidis returned to Sinjar from Duhok governorate in May 2025, most have not received the promised return grant of 4 million dinars [approximately 2 624 EUR] nor the household items pledged by the government.568 Following the recognition by the Iraqi government of the Yazidi land rights in 2022,569 in April 2025 the Real Estate Registration Department authorities in Sinjar launched the distribution of 1 338 ownership letters and issued approximately 100 title deeds to Yazidi residents in Dugrey and Tel Uzair Mujama'at (Sinjar).570

As a result, Yazidi beneficiaries, who were historically denied the right to register land in their names, are now officially recognised as landowners.571 However, Yazidis still face systemic discrimination572 and stigmatisation.573 In August 2024, a new campaign of hate speech574 prompted a renewed wave of displacement.575 According to several scientific reviews, Yazidis genocide survivors, especially women, suffer from mental health issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and increased suicide and attempted suicide rates.576 Under the 2016 National Card Law,577 children born of rape in ISIL captivity by Yazidi mothers are considered Muslim, thus resulting in an 'insurmountable' barrier to reintegration and a limited community acceptance for survivors.578 This remains a deeply contentious issue within the community579 (See section 2.7 on Children).

Christians

Despite the establishment of committees tasked with restoring Christian-owned property,580 Christians in the KRI and disputed territories continued to report unresolved property claims, particularly where KRG officials or private individuals are alleged to have appropriated abandoned properties.581 While the presence of Christians in Ninewa Plains continued to decline, Shabak community continued to expand, with Shia Shabak occupying key roles in the area.582 The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ)583 reported that Iraq's blasphemy laws have been reportedly used to arrest and intimidate individuals for their religious beliefs, including Christians.584 In April 2025, an individual armed with an axe attacked a parade celebrating the Akitu (Assyrian New Year) in Duhok, resulting in two casualties. According to the Kurdistan Region's Security Council, initial information indicated that the suspect was a Syrian national who allegedly endorsed the ideology of ISIL.585

Turkmen

The Iraqi Turkmen faced mounting political, social, and institutional setbacks. Once considered Iraq's 'third nationality', their political standing weakened significantly after the Supreme Court abolished their minority quota in the Kurdistan Regional Parliament in February 2024, reducing their seats from five to two. Efforts to gain a guaranteed share in state institutions have largely failed.586

Sunnis

Sunni Arabs returnees faced discrimination and social friction upon return, particularly from minority communities who perceived them as associated to ISIL. Some Sunni families reported fear of stigmatisation and obstacles to reintegration into diverse communities.587

Other minorities

People of African descent face marginalisation and stigmatisation,588 living in informal settlements with no proper infrastructure or basic services.589 Roma and people of African descent face discrimination in accessing labour market, health services and education.590 Additionally, they are not included under the quota system and are not represented in the Council of Representatives.591 In the Ninewa Plains, Assyrians experienced restriction of

movement and arbitrary treatment at checkpoints by the PMF-affiliated 30th Brigade. The rapid shift in the demographic change caused tensions between Assyrian and Shabak communities in the Ninewa Plains.592 Feyli Kurds in Mandali (Diyala governorate) have voiced grievances about neglect and marginalisation, decades after the genocidal campaigns they suffered under Saddam Hussein.593

Converts and atheists

For background information on the treatment of converts, including converts to Christianity in Iraq, see the EUAA Country Focus, May 2024, section 1.6.2. Atheists in Iraq reportedly face systemic discrimination. When accessing public services, citizens are often obliged to disclose their religious affiliation.594

Inter-sect marriages

Conflict and rising sectarian tensions have led to a sharp decline in inter-sect marriages, a rise in divorces among mixed-sect couples and a growing preference for intra-sectarian marriages.595

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