



Iraq – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 18 November 2015

Information on the current position of the Sunni population in Baghdad. Can the Sunni people rely on State protection ? Any information on whether it is possible to relocate.

A report published by the Finnish Immigration Service, in a section titled “Background”, states:

“The Sunnis have, however, been dissatisfied with the Shia administration, and feel that it is discriminating against them. The unwillingness of the Shia administration to integrate Sunnis into the administration sparked public protests between 2011 and 2013 among the Sunni population. These protests were suppressed by the security forces. Protesters have been killed, arrested, assaulted and accused of belonging to al-Qaeda. The general security situation in Iraq changed again as the civil war in Syria escalated and ISIS began to take control of areas in western Iraq. When ISIS invaded Mosul in June 2014 and the Iraqi army fled, Shia militias began to organise themselves in order to defend Iraq and Baghdad, in particular, against the ISIS Sunni fighters. Even before this, the Shia militias had behaved violently towards the Sunni population in response to the ISIS troops gaining ground in Iraq. Sunnis were considered ISIS supporters and were feared to be members of ISIS. ISIS continues to set off bombs in Baghdad almost daily, targeting Shia districts with the intention of demonstrating its ability to push into Baghdad. Together with the Iraqi security forces, Shia militias are inciting fear among Baghdad's Sunni population. It is feared that the Shia militias will take revenge for ISIS's actions on Sunnis who have nothing to do with ISIS. Shia militias have committed serious human rights violations against the Sunnis.” (Finnish Immigration Service (29 April 2015) *Security Situation in Baghdad - The Shia Militias*, p.2)

An article from the Guardian refers to Sunni living in Baghdad as follows:

“In the Ghazaliyah living room where Ahmed Jabouri and his brother Haithem have sat and smoked through the worst of the past decade, they say the renewed uncertainty is, for the first time, making them want to leave the country for good. ‘How can people live together again,’ said Ahmed. “I had stayed because there was hope. Even in the darkest days, there always seemed like there would be something better, some day. Now the horizon is black. It’s not easy being Sunni in Baghdad anymore. Every checkpoint (where the brothers’ identifiably Sunni name is checked on their ID cards) means delays, or even detention. ‘Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq are looking for us,’ he said of the much-feared militia unit that lurks near the main checkpoint leading into his neighbourhood. ‘It’s only because the officer is strong that they don’t cause havoc here. But they have taken away some Sunnis. We don’t know what happened to them.’” (Guardian (UK) (7 November 2014) *Iraq returns to risk of splitting along sectarian lines*)

A report from the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in a section titled “Conflict-related displacement of civilians”, states:

“Widespread displacement has heavily impacted host communities, with tensions between host communities, IDPs, and refugees increasing. For instance, local media reported growing resentment towards IDPs amongst host communities in Baghdad at the end of April, apparently driven by fears that entry of IDPs also may have permitted ISIL fighters to enter the city. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that IDPs who had found shelter in Baghdad mosques were evicted by members of the host community. Several reports were received concerning the killing and abduction of individuals displaced from Anbar into Baghdad. For instance, on 29 April, Iraqi Police found the remains of two males who died from gunshot wounds: one in Amil, south-western Baghdad, and another in Bayaa, eastern Baghdad. The victims were reported to have been IDPs from Anbar and it was alleged that they had been killed by a Shi’a militia. A source reported to UNAM/OHCHR that Shi’a militias in Amil threatened Anbar IDPs that they would be killed if they did not leave. Such threats were reportedly not issued to members of the Sunni community normally resident of the area.” (UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (13 July 2015) *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015*, p.8)

The Summary of a report published by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) states:

“While most Baghdad neighbourhoods used to be inhabited by a mix of Sunni and Shiite in the past, the violent sectarian cleansing in the 2000’s resulted in the city now appearing as much more segregated and Shiite-dominated. The most extensive internal flight has occurred inside Baghdad and into the city from parts of the country where war has raged for quite some time. The flight out of the city does not appear nearly as extensive.” (Landinfo - Country of Origin Information Centre (13 February 2015) *Iraq: Baghdad - the security situation as of February 2015*, p.3)

In a section titled “Level of Crime and Extent of Official Protection” (section 2.8) this report states:

“Government protection seems inadequate, because the police’s abilities are limited by resources and skills, while the will to provide protection is limited by religious affiliation and corruption. As mentioned, the police have been strongly infiltrated by Shiite militias, to such extent that they should be considered to be potentially biased with regards to sectarian lines of conflict.” (ibid, p.16)

The Executive Summary of the most recent US Department of State report on religious freedom in Iraq states:

“The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and practice, and freedom from intellectual, political, and religious coercion. While representatives of various religious communities, including Sunni Muslims, reported that the government did not generally interfere with religious observances and devoted considerable attention to the protection of religious

sites and events, many Sunnis considered themselves targeted by the government and the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). International human rights groups and Sunni Muslims reported that the ISF tortured, abused, arrested, illegally detained, and harassed Sunni Muslims on the basis of their religious affiliation. Activists also said the government failed to investigate and prosecute ethno-sectarian crimes, including those carried out by Shia militia and Kurdish forces against Sunnis in areas liberated from ISIL.” (US Department of State (14 October 2015) *2014 Report on International Religious Freedom – Iraq*, p.1)

A report published by Refugees International, in a section titled “Conditions and assistance”, states:

“The fear for their own safety appears more acute among Sunni refugees from Anbar who have been forced to relocate to Baghdad. They are routinely suspected of having ISIS sympathies simply because of their place of origin, and some spoke of having been pushed out by local residents in Shia areas. Thus, they were now experiencing their second displacement. While plenty of IDPs in Baghdad would like to move on, they don’t because of the fear of having to travel through that province to reach another location they might consider safer.” (Refugees International (2 November 2015) *Displaced in Iraq: Little Aid and Few Options*, p.7)

An Associated Press Online report states:

“Baghdad residents were suspicious of the displaced from the start and when the exodus started, the displaced Sunnis from Anbar were stopped from entering the Iraqi capital unless they could find a local sponsor. There have since been reports of these Sunnis being harassed in their makeshift camps and mosques where they are sleeping on the city's outskirts, with some even kicked out of homes they have rented. The U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian affairs said the displaced face eviction amid fears there could be IS militants hiding among them. Sunni lawmakers have expressed outrage over such accusations, saying it is the Shiite-dominated government scapegoating Sunnis for its own security lapses. ‘The people of Anbar are innocent, those who were fleeing Daesh and running for their lives have nothing to do with what is going on in Baghdad,’ said Sunni politician Raad al-Dahlki. Baghdad was once a mixed Sunni-Shiite city, but since the sectarian bloodletting in 2006-2007 it has become mostly Shiite and there is a great deal of suspicion between the two communities. (Associated Press Online (1 May 2015) *Baghdad officials blame Sunni displaced for wave of bombings*)

A report from Human Rights Watch states:

“Since April 2015, the government has imposed restrictions on entry into Baghdad and Babylon provinces affecting just under 200,000 people fleeing fighting between the extremist armed group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and government and tribal forces in Ramadi, capital of the majority Sunni Anbar province. Kurdish authorities are also imposing restrictions on people trying to enter by land areas under their control. By requiring those who enter to have local guarantors, the restrictions in practice discriminate against Sunni Arabs. Thousands of people remain stranded in Anbar province putting them at risk should there be a further advance by ISIS. In addition,

Sunnis in Baghdad have reported attacks and threats against them.” (Human Rights Watch (29 May 2015) *Iraq: Curbs Put War's Displaced at Risk*)

A report from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre states:

“The ability of displaced people to access safe areas of refuge has been dramatically restricted by the fragmentation of society along sectarian lines and security threats linked to terrorism and counter-insurgency. The Kurdish-controlled north including Kirkuk city, hosts more than a third of Iraq's internally displaced persons (IDPs) – some 1.2 million as of June 2015, including minority groups. Some 611,700 Sunni Arabs displaced from areas under the control of the Islamic State (ISIL) now find themselves with few safe locations to flee to. Sunnis from areas controlled by ISIL have increasingly been denied the possibility of fleeing to areas controlled by the Government of Iraq (GoI) or by the peshmerga (the militia forces in Iraqi Kurdistan), thus having no choice except to return to areas controlled by ISIL. This has further cemented the division of Iraq into, Kurdish, Sunni and Shia entities.” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (30 June 2015) *Iraq: IDPs caught between a rock and a hard place as displacement crisis deepens*, p.1)

An IRIN News report states:

“Civilians travelling through Iraq meet these disparate forms of authority at road checkpoints. They control who moves, who is allowed where. One group finds it harder than others to navigate this treacherous landscape and settle - Sunni Arabs.” (IRIN News (16 September 2015) *The tragedy of Iraq's Sunnis*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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