

2.2.3. Deserters from Al-Shabaab

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last updated: June 2022

This profile refers to individuals having deserted from Al-Shabaab. This profile is particularly relevant in South-Central Somalia and Puntland, given the group's presence and influence in these areas.

In the context of leaving Al-Shabaab, no clear distinction is made between the terms 'deserter' and 'defector'. Reports often use the two terms interchangeably, irrespective of whether the person who left Al-Shabaab has joined another armed actor or not.

COI summary

[[Targeting](#), 1]

Treatment of deserters by Al-Shabaab

Leaving Al-Shabaab is generally not accepted and desertion is seen as an infringement of the jihadist ideology. Al-Shabaab would seek to punish those defectors it can reach in order to provide a shocking example for others who might be contemplating defection. Deserters risk being imprisoned and/or executed by Al-Shabaab. This punishment applies not only to combatants but to anyone who leaves the group without permission. However, it is not unusual for injured Al-Shabaab fighters to be allowed to return to their families to be treated or cared for. Once they are fine again, some of these fighters return to their units. Moreover, some recruits are working part-time for the organisation, keeping up on their everyday duties like farm or business work.

It has been reported that in several cases, people who attempted to leave Al-Shabaab have been killed, or the Amniyat has targeted their families. The threats

made against former Al-Shabaab members have been described as so serious that 'there were 80 guards for 84 defectors' at a rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu.

Deserters rehabilitated by the government authorities generally benefit from a certain level of protection in rehabilitation centres but lack any protection when leaving them, making it difficult for them to reunite with their families without risking their own and their family's lives, or to set up a business.

Many low-ranking members reluctant to fight and fearing aerial attacks have deserted and fled to their clans or homes. A low-profile person, i.e. a person who did not occupy a middle or higher position within the organisation, who has deserted from the ranks of Al-Shabaab is unlikely to be pursued over large distances. However, there can always be situations where an individual's identity is checked. In such a situation, it can happen that Al-Shabaab actors, through extensive networks of people, become aware that this is the person who previously acted in an undesirable way, which might lead to reprisals by the group. A person who occupied a middle or higher position in the group rarely defects because they would reportedly be killed in government-controlled areas since the government is unable to protect its own officials, let alone Al-Shabaab defectors. Furthermore, whether Al-Shabaab will chase defectors from the countryside who fled to Mogadishu depends on how much clan support the defecting person has, with individuals belonging to clans with strong representation in Al-Shabaab being at higher risk. Persons who defected from Al-Shabaab were frightened that they will be tracked down by the Amniyat.

Women deserters are not only seen as deserting the group but also as breaking up a marriage. For more information on the treatment of women who have left Al-Shabaab see sub-profile [2.11.2 Violence by Al-Shabaab](#) under profile [2.11 Women and girls](#).

Treatment of deserters by government authorities

It has been noted that the government is actively encouraging defection from Al-Shabaab. The way deserters are treated by the authorities is further influenced by their clan affiliation. The majority of defectors are categorised as low-risk by the NISA, including defectors who have killed for Al-Shabaab. Those considered as 'low-risk' by the NISA can be rehabilitated in dedicated centres. At times, FGS authorities granted amnesty for 'low-risk' Al-Shabaab defectors. Deserters from Al-Shabaab considered to be of a 'higher risk' by the NISA face potential prosecution by the Justice Ministry. If not sentenced to death, such 'high-risk'

deserters risk being imprisoned indefinitely by the FGS due to the limited capacity for rehabilitation. Children can receive education and vocational training in NGO-run approved centres.

Risk analysis

Criminal prosecution in itself does not amount to persecution. However, deserters from Al-Shabaab could be exposed to acts which are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. death penalty or indefinite imprisonment imposed by state forces, detention or execution by Al-Shabaab).

In the case of deserters from Al-Shabaab, well-founded fear of persecution by the group would in general be substantiated.

Further risk of persecution by the state should be assessed on the basis of risk-impacting circumstances, such as rank/role in Al-Shabaab (e.g. being considered 'high-risk' by the state authorities), etc.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of religion and/or (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see chapter [Exclusion](#)).



See other topics concerning individuals fearing recruitment by Al-Shabaab and deserters from Al-Shabaab:

- [2.2.1. Persons fearing forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab](#)
- [2.2.2. Child recruitment by Al-Shabaab](#)
- [2.2.3. Deserters from Al-Shabaab](#)

