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COI QUERY

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Türkiye

Situation of Turkish Kurds with real or perceived affiliation with the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria

1. Background information on YPG and involvement of Kurds from Türkiye

The People's Protection Units (YPG) were formed in 2011 at the outset of the civil war in Syria,¹ and has been described by sources as the military wing of the Syria-based Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).² Since 2015, YPG – mainly active in northern Syria³ – has been the main component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF),⁴ a United States-backed military alliance established to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁵ The Kurdish-led SDF⁶ also included allied Arab groups and other factions.⁷

Specific information on the number of SDF and YPG members, as well as information on the number of Turkish citizens as members of the above groups, could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query. According to International Crisis Group, the YPG included in its ranks several hundred non-Syrian PKK-trained members, which Türkiye viewed 'as a concern'.⁸ According to its commander, the SDF comprised about 100 000 members at the beginning of 2025.⁹ However, a December 2025 article by Reuters indicated that SDF had 'roughly 50 000 fighters'.¹⁰ Moreover, according to sources, an armed group of foreign volunteers including Turkish citizens, called as International Freedom Battalion (IFB), operated under the YPG. The IFB was also composed of several armed groups, with the majority of them reportedly being Turkish 'Communist/Socialist revolutionary organisations',¹¹ including the Turkish-originated Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP).¹² An

¹ Rudaw, Syrian Kurdish forces support sustaining ceasefire, warn of response if attacked, 26 January 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Strengthening Iraq-Türkiye Ties amid Regional Tensions, 9 December 2025, [url](#), p. 5

² Al Jazeera, What do we know about the Kurdish groups in the Middle East?, 19 January 2026, [url](#); BBC News, Turkish strikes in Syria cut water to one million people, 19 November 2024, [url](#)

³ International Crisis Group, The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace, 16 May 2025, [url](#); BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴ Al Jazeera, Türkiye says Kurdish-led armed groups in Syria will be 'eliminated', 6 January 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Regional Perspectives on the House of Assad's Fall, 17 December 2024, [url](#); HRW, "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon": Syria: Abuses, Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Territories, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁵ International Crisis Group, The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace, 16 May 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Damascus – SDF negotiations await the "deal", 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶ BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#); CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 15 September 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁷ Al Jazeera, What do we know about the Kurdish groups in the Middle East?, 19 January 2026, [url](#); CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 21 May 2024, [url](#), p. 18

⁸ International Crisis Group, The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace, 16 May 2025, [url](#)

⁹ Enab Baladi, Damascus – SDF negotiations await the "deal", 30 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰ Reuters, Exclusive: Syria, Kurdish forces race to save integration deal ahead of deadline, 19 December 2025, [url](#)

¹¹ Medium, The International Freedom Battalion, 19 June 2018, [url](#)

¹² New Arab (The), 'Communist militants' among US partners in Syria, 17 May 2019, [url](#); MEE, Bob Crow brigade '30 miles' from IS-stronghold of Raqqa in Syria, 16 August 2016, [url](#)

academic article cited a 2015 publication by the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet, according to which 8 500 persons were estimated to have joined the YPG from Turkey.¹³ More recent information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query.

Further detailed information on the SDF and YPG and relevant developments, can be found in the EUAA Country of Origin Information Report: [Syria: Country Focus](#), published in July 2025.

2. Treatment by state

Information on the treatment by the Turkish state of Kurds with real or perceived affiliation with the People's Protection Units (YPG) was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query. However, the following information may be relevant.

According to sources, Türkiye considers the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),¹⁴ which is designated as a 'terrorist' group by Türkiye.¹⁵ Due to the ties with PKK, Türkiye also views both the YPG¹⁶ and the SDF as 'terrorist' organisations.¹⁷

Türkiye was reported to consider the quasi-autonomous SDF-ruled territories in northern Syria as its 'main security concern'¹⁸ and as 'a direct threat to its national security'.¹⁹ According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Turkish military operations in Syria were largely focused on the YPG, seeking to prevent the group from gaining territories²⁰ and 'establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey'.²¹

Sources dated within the time frame of this query response noted that Turkish military and Turkish-backed militias have continued to carry out operations targeting Syrian Kurdish groups,²² including YPG in northern Syria.²³ According to International Crisis Group, in the period 2023 – 2024, Türkiye intensified its operations against the YPG, often targeting

¹³ Övet, K. et al., Understanding PKK, Kurdish Hezbollah and ISIS Recruitment in Southeastern Turkey, February 2022, [url](#), p. 753

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Strengthening Iraq-Türkiye Ties amid Regional Tensions, 9 December 2025, [url](#), p. 5; DW, What does the end of the PKK mean for Turkey?, 15 May 2025, [url](#); BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, What do we know about the Kurdish groups in the Middle East?, 19 January 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Regional Perspectives on the House of Assad's Fall, 17 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, Türkiye says Kurdish-led armed groups in Syria will be 'eliminated', 6 January 2025, [url](#); HRW, "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon": Syria: Abuses, Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Territories, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁷ CFR, Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups, 27 May 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, Regional Perspectives on the House of Assad's Fall, 17 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁹ HRW, "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon": Syria: Abuses, Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Territories, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 11

²⁰ Chatham House, The dissolution of the PKK could transform Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy, 22 May 2025, [url](#)

²¹ CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 21 May 2024, [url](#), p. 18

²² CFR, Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups, 27 May 2025, [url](#)

²³ CFR, Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups, 27 May 2025, [url](#); CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 21 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, Türkiye's Strikes Wreak Havoc on Northeast Syria, 9 February 2024, [url](#)

YPG/SDF targets and infrastructure in Syria as a response to PKK attacks in Türkiye or in Iraq.²⁴

Moreover, in a December 2023 publication, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees of Germany (BAMF) noted that, according to information by the Turkish Ministry of Defence, since the beginning of 2023 and as of 7 September 2023, state forces have killed or arrested more than 1 180 PKK or YPG members, including people who were in Iraq and northern Syria.²⁵ Further information on arrests of YPG members in Türkiye could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query.

Following the PKK's formal announcement of the dissolution of the group in May 2025,²⁶ sources have cited Turkish officials stating that this applied to all groups associated with the PKK, including the YPG,²⁷ calling for its disbandment.²⁸ Sources dated in May 2025 indicated that SDF²⁹ or YPG have not taken a formal position on the PKK's disbandment decision.³⁰ However, prior to the call by Abdullah Öcalan, leader of PKK, for the dissolution and disarmament of the group in February 2025, the SDF commander stated that this call only related to PKK not to their own activities in Syria.³¹ As of January 2026, the YPG was reportedly still active, as indicated by media sources.³²

Following a March 2025 integration deal - not enacted due to a lack of implementation by the involved parties -, the Syrian government and SDF reached an agreement on 30 January 2026 including a ceasefire and the integration of Kurdish military forces and institutions into the state.³³ The head of YPG's media office told Rudaw that the group supported the continuation of the ceasefire, however stated that 'they will respond forcefully to any attacks by the Syrian Arab Army or its affiliated factions'.³⁴ The Turkish newspaper Daily Sabah noted that foreign non-Syrian YPG members were not included in the aforementioned integration agreement.³⁵

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that due to the links of YPG and PKK, Kurdish people who resided under SDF rule, and who were thereby perceived as 'loyal to the SDF or to any of its various components, have overwhelmingly borne the brunt of the abuses documented' by Turkish armed forces and Turkish-allied groups in Turkish-occupied northern

²⁴ International Crisis Group, Strengthening Iraq-Türkiye Ties amid Regional Tensions, 9 December 2025, [url](#), p. 19

²⁵ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 31 December 2023, [url](#), p. 4

²⁶ CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 15 September 2025, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 30 June 2025, [url](#), p. 6; International Crisis Group, The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace, 16 May 2025, [url](#)

²⁸ CRS, Turkey (Türkiye): Major Issues and U.S. Relations, 15 September 2025, [url](#), p. 18; Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary, 30 June 2025, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹ CFR, Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups, 27 May 2025, [url](#)

³⁰ International Crisis Group, The PKK's Decision to Disband May Offer a Historic Chance at Peace, 16 May 2025, [url](#)

³¹ Guardian (The), PKK declares ceasefire with Turkey after more than 40 years of conflict, 1 March 2025, [url](#);

Reuters, SDF chief says PKK disarmament call 'not related to us in Syria', 27 February 2025, [url](#)

³² Rudaw, Syrian Kurdish forces support sustaining ceasefire, warn of response if attacked, 26 January 2026, [url](#);

Reuters, Kurdish commander calls on US to 'intervene forcefully' in Syria clashes, 18 January 2026, [url](#)

³³ BBC News, Syrian government reaches deal with Kurdish-led forces, 30 January 2026, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kurdish-led SDF agrees integration with Syrian government forces, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

³⁴ Rudaw, Syrian Kurdish forces support sustaining ceasefire, warn of response if attacked, 26 January 2026, [url](#)

³⁵ Daily Sabah, What does the dissolution of the YPG in Syria mean for Iraq?, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

Syria.³⁶ These human rights violations included abductions, torture, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings, and detention-related abuses often occurred on suspicion of links with SDF, YPG, PKK, or affiliate groups.³⁷ According to the same source, other non-Kurdish individuals, as well as Arabs, who were perceived to have had ties with the SDF, were also targeted.³⁸

Further information on the treatment of individuals who are involved, or perceived to be involved, in pro-Kurdish social media activism in Türkiye can be found in the EUAA Query [Treatment by the state of individuals, including returnees, who are involved, or perceived to be involved, in pro-Kurdish social media activism](#), published on 23 February 2024.

3. Treatment by society

Information on the treatment by society of Kurdish citizens with real or perceived affiliation with the YPG in Türkiye could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query.

³⁶ HRW, “Everything is by the Power of the Weapon”: Syria: Abuses, Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Territories, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 3

³⁷ HRW, Human Rights Watch Submission to the Human Rights Committee on Türkiye: 142nd Session (14 October – 7 November 2024), September 2024, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸ HRW, “Everything is by the Power of the Weapon”: Syria: Abuses, Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Territories, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 3

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Ebert-Stiftung (FES); France – Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (OFPRA); France 24; Freedom House; Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA); Institute for the Study of War (ISW); International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS); Norway – Landinfo; Le Monde; Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe (SFH); The New Humanitarian; TRT World; Turkish Minute; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Refworld