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Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Türkiye – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

02 January 2023

DBP chairmen arrested

On 27.12.22, it was reported that a court had ordered the arrest of two leaders of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP), Keskin Bayındır and Hayrettin Altun, in Diyarbakır province. They are accused of "membership of an armed terrorist organisation". The arrests came after Turkish police had previously temporarily detained 14 members of the party in simultaneous raids carried out on DBP buildings and other locations in 10 provinces, including Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakır. According to the statements they issued to the prosecutor's office, the chairmen in Diyarbakır province were put on trial after their arrest, while the other suspects were released pending trial under judicial supervision. The party officials are accused of having links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Femicides

On 30.12.22, it was reported that according to the We Will Stop Femicide organisation, at least 392 women were murdered by men and 226 women died under suspicious circumstances in 2022. The number of femicides thus increased compared to 2021 when 280 women were murdered by men and 217 women died under suspicious circumstances.

Arrests for suspected membership of terrorist organisations

On 01.01.23, security forces arrested 33 people during raids carried out in south-eastern Türkiye's Hatay province. They are accused of being members of terrorist organisations. Sixteen of the arrested persons are alleged to be members of the PKK, while another 17 are alleged to be members of ISIS.

09 January 2023

Deportations

On 07.01.23, the Presidency of Migration Management reported that a total of 1,028 refugees had been deported between 01.01.23 and 05.01.23. It added that during this period, 1,889 refugees had been prevented from entering Türkiye. According to the Presidency, a further 20,497 refugees remain at repatriation centres.

Arrests for suspected membership of terrorist organisations

On 07.01.23, the Ministry of National Defence announced that it had arrested a total of ten people at the border with Greece who were suspected of being members or supporters of a terrorist organisation. Among them were eight persons suspected of being members of the Gülen movement and two persons who were reportedly members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). During 2022, a total of 1,263 people suspected of being members of terrorist groups were reportedly arrested by the Turkish Border Guard in Edirne province, on the border with Greece,

according to the Ministry of National Defence. Those arrested reportedly included 939 members of the Gülen movement, 289 members of the PKK and 39 members of other terrorist groups.

23 January 2023

Deportations

On 19.01.23, the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management announced that between 01.01.23 and 19.01.23, a total of 5,466 refugees and migrants had been deported from Türkiye, 2,215 of them on flights to their countries of origin. According to the authorities, more than 124,000 refugees and migrants are reported to have been deported from Türkiye in 2022.

Village guard killed

On 22.01.23, the Turkish Ministry of Interior announced that a village guard had been killed during the anti-terrorist "Eren Abluka Autumn Winter-23" operation carried out in the eastern province of Sirnak. According to a Twitter post by Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu, the perpetrators are members of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party).

30 January 2023

Deportation of refugees to Syria

On 24.01.23, Turkish authorities deported around 40 Syrian refugees who were in possession of the "Kimlik" temporary residence permit, via the Bab Al-Salama border crossing, north of Aleppo, from Türkiye to areas under the control of Turkish forces in northern Syria. The deportees are to be settled in what the Turkish government calls the "safe zone".

On 18.01.23, more than 30 Syrian nationals, including women and children, who had recently entered Turkish territory, were taken to migration authority centres in the Kilis region to prepare for their deportation to Syria.

Ruling in HDP trial

On 26.01.23, the Constitutional Court rejected the request filed by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to postpone the court proceedings on the dissolution of the party until the crucial elections on 14.05.23. The proceedings to dissolve the party have been ongoing since March 2021.

06 February 2023

Arrests on suspicion of terrorism

On 31.01.23, it was reported that according to the Ministry of Interior, a total of 1,042 operations were carried out against the ISIS terrorist organisation in 2022 and 1,981 people were arrested. In January 2023, 60 operations were conducted against ISIS and 95 people were arrested.

A total of 134,713 operations were conducted against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and YPG (People's Protection Unit) in 2022, and 8,410 people were arrested. In January 2023, nine thousand and forty operations were conducted against the PKK and YPG, and a total of 378 people were arrested.

Femicide and gender-based violence

On 03.02.23, it was reported that according to the NGO We Will Stop Femicide (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu), a total of 31 women were the victims of femicide in January 2023, whereas 28 women died under suspicious circumstances. Six of the victims had obtained restraining orders against the perpetrators. Fifteen women were murdered by their partners or ex-partners. Most of the women were killed by a close male relative such as a husband, father or brother. During the same period, another 72 women reported being victims of gender-based violence, while 13 women reported being forced into prostitution.

Gülen movement

On 30.01.23, the Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office issued arrest warrants for 11 persons suspected of having links to the Gülen movement. The police arrested 10 of the suspects. Eight people were arrested on the same day during police operations in Kastamonu as part of the investigation carried out by the provincial prosecutor's office.

On 31.01.23, arrest warrants were issued for 35 male and female academics who used to work at Gülen universities as part of an investigation launched by the Ankara General Prosecutor's Office. During police operations carried out in 32 provinces, 27 people were arrested.

13 February 2023

Declaration of a state of emergency

On 09.02.23, a three-month state of emergency came into effect with the government's approval aimed at accelerating rescue and relief efforts in the provinces of Türkiye affected by the earthquakes. The 7.7 and 7.6 magnitude earthquakes and aftershocks, centred in the province of Kahramanmaraş, affected 13 million people in ten provinces, including Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye and Sanlıurfa. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had already declared a three-month state of emergency on 07.02.23.

According to current media reports, more than 35,000 people have been killed and more than 80,000 others injured in the earthquakes in Türkiye (as of 13.02.23). The earthquake and the aftershocks on 06.02.23 have left widespread destruction, particularly in the south of Türkiye on the Turkish-Syrian border. More than 6,444 buildings have collapsed and approximately 380,000 people have been left homeless. Other countries in the region, including Syria and Lebanon, have also been affected by the earthquakes.

Arrests and blocking of Twitter

On 09.02.23, it was reported that criticism of the Turkish government in relation to the earthquake of 06.02.23 led to the social media platform Twitter being blocked for at least 12 hours on 08.02.23. The NGO Netblocks, which monitors cybersecurity on the Internet, said that the type of blocking used suggested that it had been instigated by the government. On 09.02.23, the blocking was lifted again. In connection with the earthquakes, police arrested at least 18 people for "spreading provocative posts" on social media that were critical of the government's response.

20 February 2023

Consequences of the earthquakes

On 20.02.23, it was reported that more than 46,000 people had been killed in the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria on 06.02.23. According to media reports, the death toll in Türkiye is 40,642, while neighbouring Syria has reported more than 5,800 fatalities. It is expected that the death toll will continue to rise. Many people are still missing. Approximately 345,000 homes have been destroyed in Türkiye. Almost two weeks after the earthquake, Türkiye is ending its rescue efforts. Rescue operations were suspended in nine of the total of eleven affected provinces in Türkiye on 19.02.23.

Arrests in connection with the earthquakes

On 19.02.23, Turkish media reported that the authorities had arrested 131 suspects following investigations into the collapse of buildings destroyed by the deadly earthquakes. It was reported that 430 suspects were responsible for the buildings collapsing due to poor construction.

Voluntary return of Syrian refugees

On 19.02.23, Minister of National Defence Hulusi Akar stated that 10,633 Syrian refugees had voluntarily returned across the border to Syria after the recent earthquakes in southern Türkiye, thus rejecting reports that Türkiye was facing a new wave of migration.

27 February 2023

Deaths in further earthquakes in Hatay

On 21.02.23, at least six people were killed and another 294 injured in new earthquakes in the southern Turkish province of Hatay. The two quakes, measuring 6.4 and 5.8 in magnitude respectively, occurred two weeks after the severe earthquakes of 06.02.23 in the same region. The Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) reported that the first quake of magnitude 6.4 shook Defne district in the province at 8:04 pm local time before the second quake of magnitude 5.8 struck three minutes later, with the epicentre in Samandag district. According to

press reports, the tremors were felt in many neighbouring provinces as well as in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus and Egypt. In Syria, 26 people were reported injured. The mayor of Hatay province, Lutfu Savas, said that the earthquakes had caused more buildings to collapse and that people had been buried under the rubble. According to media reports, rescue workers are working in the city of Antakya to recover people buried under the rubble.

Humanitarian situation following the earthquakes

On 21.02.23, a spokesperson for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said that an estimated 1.5 million people in Türkiye had been left homeless by the recent earthquakes and that approximately 500,000 housing units needed to be rebuilt in the country. The Turkish government had reportedly inspected around 70% of the buildings affected by the quakes. Of these, 412,000 housing units in 118,000 buildings had collapsed or would have to be completely demolished. The government had completed the search and rescue phase for the first quakes on 19.02.23, and the last survivor had been rescued almost 300 hours after the quake.

At a press conference held on 21.02.23, WHO senior emergency officer Catherine Smallwood said communicable disease control was crucial as many of the people left homeless were living in confined spaces, some with inadequate access to sanitation and clean water. She said there was an increased risk of respiratory diseases, cholera, hepatitis A and measles.

At least 44,374 people were killed in the powerful earthquakes that shook south-eastern Türkiye on 06.02.23, the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) announced on 26.02.23. The head of AFAD also said that search and rescue work had been completed in almost 21,000 buildings.

06 March 2023

Internal displacement due to the earthquakes

On 28.02.23, it was reported that the Turkish Disaster Management Authority (AFAD) had resettled 528,146 people in the three weeks following the earthquakes and that a large number of people had left the earthquake region by their own means. According to media reports, the earthquakes have led to significant internal displacement, putting a heavy strain on resources in the country's major cities. Many survivors left the 10 provinces most affected by the earthquakes and moved to neighbouring cities or to the country's largest urban centres. Estimates put the number of internally displaced people at around five million. One of the largest refugee movements took place in the southern province of Mersin. The provincial capital of the same name, with almost two million inhabitants, took in around 400,000 earthquake survivors. A further 140,000 survivors initially settled in the coastal province of Antalya, according to the governor of Antalya. There are no concrete figures for migration to Türkiye's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, but according to media reports, these cities have also taken in large numbers of survivors. In addition to the increased demand for housing from the new arrivals, there is also increased demand from people who already live in the major urban centres and have begun to move out of earthquake-prone homes into newer, safer buildings. This increased demand has led to a surge in rents.

Meanwhile, Turkish nationals are not the only people to have been displaced from the earthquake zone. According to media reports, 35,000 Syrian refugees returned to Syria in the two weeks following the earthquakes. A further 2,000 quake victims are reported to have been sent back to Syria. Of the approximately four million Syrian refugees currently residing in Türkiye, 1.7 million are in the ten provinces affected by the earthquakes.

Consequences of the earthquakes

On 02.03.23, it was reported that according to AFAD, the death toll in Türkiye's southern provinces had risen to at least 45,089. In addition, more than 108,000 people were reported injured. According to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change, 202,000 buildings have collapsed or have been damaged to such an extent that they have to be demolished. The Ministry says this corresponds to 582,000 individual apartments. Approximately 13.5 million people have been affected by the earthquakes in the region. AFAD reported on 28.02.23 that around two million people made homeless by the disaster have been housed in tents, container houses and other facilities in the region and other parts of the country. According to UNICEF estimates as of 28.02.23, three million people, including 2.5 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance in the wake of the earthquakes in Türkiye.

13 March 2023

Protests on International Women's Day

On 08.03.23, police arrested several people and used tear gas against protestors during demonstrations to mark International Women's Day in Istanbul. In advance, the Istanbul District Governor's Office had, as in previous years, closed the central Taksim district and the surrounding area to demonstrations or marches on the occasion of International Women's Day. The authorities said the planned march for International Women's Day had been banned out of concern for public order and national security, as well as to prevent crime and protect the rights and freedoms of others. The Istanbul Governorate had closed Taksim metro station, the exit of Şişhane metro station in İstiklal Avenue and the Taksim-Kabataş funicular as a precautionary measure, and police had also set up barricades in the area.

Arrests over social media comments

On 09.03.23, it was reported that police in Türkiye had arrested at least 157 people for posting anti-government content about the earthquakes of 06.02.23. Those arrested are accused of posting "provocative" messages on social media. The authorities had previously launched investigations against 1,139 people. Of these, 157 people were taken into temporary custody, while pre-trial detention was confirmed for a further 29 people who had previously been arrested. As part of the investigations, 81 websites and social media accounts that solicited donations for earthquake victims under false identities were also shut down and found to be fraudulent.

Investigation into crimes against humanity

On 09.03.23, European human rights lawyers asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague to open an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the Turkish government. A 4,000-page dossier that was submitted to the ICC on 09.03.23 reportedly contains hundreds of testimonies allegedly describing abductions, unlawful detentions, persecutions and torture for which the current government is held responsible. Those affected reportedly number over 200,000 people, allegedly members of Kurdish organisations as well as the Gülen movement.

Although Türkiye is not a member of the ICC and thus the Court has no jurisdiction in this regard within Türkiye's national borders, the dossier also includes crimes against humanity which were allegedly committed by Türkiye beyond its borders and in 45 ICC member states. In 29 of these states, including a number of European states, Turkish nationals are alleged to have had their passports revoked and to have been refused identity documents. In 17 cases of enforced disappearance, victims from Kenya, Cambodia, Gabon, Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Mongolia and Switzerland were allegedly abducted and brought to Türkiye.

Constitutional Court decision on the HDP

On 09.03.23, the Turkish Constitutional Court lifted its block on state aid to the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). In a majority decision, the court ruled that the accounts of the HDP to which funds had been transferred from the state treasury could no longer be blocked. The funds in question are funds which are to be made available to political parties in Türkiye for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in May. The HDP is expected to receive a total of TRY 539.5 million (approximately EUR 26.14 million) from the treasury this year. The accounts had already been frozen on 05.01.21 as part of a case against the party which could still lead to its closure. The court announced on 09.03.23 that the date for the party's plea in the case would be postponed to 11.04.23.

Türkiye's six main opposition parties have agreed on Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu as their joint candidate for the presidential elections on 14.05.23. However, the HDP, the third largest party in parliament, is not represented in the group of six. Despite positive statements by some CHP officials, the HDP was excluded from the alliance because of the Turkish nationalist views of some of the other parties.

20 March 2023

Discrimination against refugees in the earthquake zone

According to a report published by the Association for Migration Research (Göç Araştırmaları Derneği) (GAR) on 13.03.23, refugees, mainly of Syrian nationality, were subjected to multi-layered discrimination, including hate

speech, ill-treatment and physical violence, in the earthquake zone following the severe earthquakes that struck southern Türkiye last month. According to the report, official figures show that 1,738,035 Syrian nationals (49.64%) who were granted temporary protection status in Türkiye were directly affected by the February 2023 earthquakes. The report said the Syrian population has been subjected to serious discrimination in the delivery of post-quake emergency aid, during which the principles of "non-discrimination" and "impartiality" have not been respected. The reports says that the discriminatory attitude against Syrians in the country was not limited to such institutions as the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and Türkiye's top charity organisation, the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) but was also displayed by local administrations. According to the report, official figures show that more than 40,000 Syrian nationals had returned to their homeland by 28.02.23. In addition, the problems of accommodation, hygiene and access to clean water and psychosocial support of the people who continue to stay in the quake-hit cities remain. Syrian refugees have been repeatedly removed from tent cities, temporary shelters and even places allocated to them by the government after the earthquake.

Meanwhile, the death toll from the earthquake has risen to over 48,000. According to government figures, the number of buildings destroyed or severely damaged has risen to over 227,000. According to local media reports, heavy rains also triggered flash floods on 15.03.23, resulting in the deaths of at least 16 people living in tents and container shelters in earthquake affected south-eastern Türkiye.

Restrictions on freedom of the press after earthquakes

On 17.03.23, it was reported that the government had further restricted the freedom of the press following the February 2023 earthquakes. After the quakes, several media professionals in the earthquake region were temporarily detained, while courts reportedly blocked access to some online news services and articles about the disaster. In addition, two days after the quakes, authorities restricted Twitter's bandwidth for about a day, blocking access to the platform. However, public criticism caused the restriction to be lifted as Twitter had played an important role in the rescue efforts. Many people under the rubble had posted their location in order to be found. According to a statement issued by the police on 13.03.23, one hundred and seventy-three people were arrested for their social media posts about the quakes, 43 of whom were remanded in custody. In addition, some of the social media users and at least one journalist were charged under the controversial law against the "spread of disinformation" passed in October 2022. In a public statement issued on 16.03.23, the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) organisation condemned the recent censorship of online reports criticising government measures following last month's severe earthquakes.

HDP proceedings

On 16.03.23, the Constitutional Court rejected a request by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) to postpone a final decision on the case, which could lead to the party being banned for alleged links to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), until after the May 2023 elections. The proceedings against the HDP, the third largest party in parliament, will therefore take place before the elections. An exact date has not yet been announced. The court also rejected the HDP's request to be granted two additional months to prepare for the trial.

27 March 2023

Allegations of torture against border guards

On 14.03.23 and 20.03.23, it was reported that Turkish border guards had arrested and tortured eight Syrian refugees who had tried to cross the Turkish-Syrian border. In the process, the refugees were allegedly beaten and forced to drink diesel. Among those tortured were two children. Two persons died as a result of the assaults, and two others were taken to a hospital in Syria after their deportation and are in intensive care there. The refugees reportedly crossed the border in Hatay province on 11.03.23. Shortly afterwards, they were allegedly arrested by border guards and taken to the checkpoint in a vehicle. According to witnesses, the refugees were beaten by the border guards. The refugees were reportedly then sent back to Syria. In the interim, the public prosecutor's office in Reyhanli opened a murder investigation against the gendarmerie officers involved. Two lieutenants and one first lieutenant were arrested. However, after being brought before the court, they were released under judicial conditions. The public prosecutor's office applied for a secrecy order for the investigation.

03 April 2023

Long-term impact of the earthquakes

On 30.03.23, UNICEF reported that around 2.7 million people were still internally displaced following the earthquakes that struck the south of the country in early February 2023. The death toll has risen to 50,096. An estimated 2.3 million people live in the areas affected by the earthquakes, among them 1.7 million in informal settlements. The Turkish doctors' union has expressed concern about the deteriorating sanitation conditions.

According to UNICEF, the priority needs still to be met are shelter, water and sanitation facilities, health care and continued schooling for children. UNICEF had previously stated that some 2.5 million children in southern Türkiye are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Aid agencies say that the effects of the earthquakes will be felt for months and years to come. The damage caused by the earthquakes in Türkiye could exceed USD 100 billion, according to the United Nations. On 28.03.23, the UN also said that several hundred thousand workers in Türkiye had lost their livelihoods as a result of the earthquakes.

Increase in child abuse cases

On 31.03.23, the Turkish Ministry of Justice informed that the number of criminal cases initiated for child sexual abuse increased by 33 percent in 2022 compared to the previous year. Child abuse crimes recorded the second highest increase of all crimes in 2023. The ministry has been accused of a lack of transparency in child abuse cases, as it had stopped publishing data in 2019. Human rights organisations accuse the Turkish government of failing to take sufficient measures to protect children. Türkiye had ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention, in 2011. Under to the Convention, Türkiye is responsible for prosecuting perpetrators and preventing child abuse.

17 April 2023

Charges against 17 media workers

On 12.04.23, the 4th Heavy Penal Court in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakır brought charges against 17 Kurdish media workers for membership of the PKK. The defendants had been arrested in June 2022, with 15 of them remanded in in pre-trial detention without charge since then. If found guilty under Türkiye's anti-terror laws, the defendants face up to 15 years in prison. The defendants are expected back in court on 11.07.23.

Parole for Yunis Karataş

On 14.04.23, the Constitutional Court ruled in the case of Yunis Karataş, who had been convicted for his involvement in a deadly arson attack on an Alevi event at the Madımak Hotel in Sivas on 02.07.93. A mob had set fire to the hotel, killing 37 people, mostly Alevi artists and academics, who were attending a conference there. Yunis Karataş had originally been sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to an aggravated life imprisonment following the abolition of the death penalty in Türkiye. He was found guilty of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and starting the fire. In a recent ruling on the question of whether Karataş was eligible for parole, the Constitutional Court argued that the distinction between a terrorist offence and a terrorist perpetrator was essential, citing the fact that Karataş was not found to have been a member of any terrorist organisation.

According to Articles 107 and 108 of the Law on Execution of Sentences and Security Measures (Law No. 5275), life prisoners may apply for parole after serving their minimum sentence. If offenses against the security of the state, crimes against the constitutional order and its functioning, and crimes against national defence, as defined by the Turkish Penal Code, are committed by an individual who acts in the name of a terrorist organization, that person is not eligible for parole according to Law No. 5275.

The court stated that an organisation can only be classified as a terrorist organisation if there is a hierarchy and continuity. In the case of the convicted Karataş, this would not apply. The court also noted that the legal definition of terrorism had changed since the attack and that the changes had a positive effect on the convict. It was decided to release him on parole.

24 April 2023

Arrest for spreading false information

On 19.04.23, journalist Serdar Akinan was arrested in the western province of Çanakkale on charges of spreading false information. A few hours before his arrest, Akinan had published a post claiming that on the night of the 2016 coup attempt, three helicopters carrying IS members from Libya and Syria landed near a hotel in Muğla where President Erdoğan was staying at the time. According to Akinan, they arrived before the soldiers who were allegedly planning to assassinate Erdoğan. Akinan had previously shared and commented on social media posts accusing AKP members of corruption and other offences

08 May 2023

Arrests among pro-Kurdish opposition circles

On 25.04.23, a large-scale police operation resulted in the arrest of more than 100 people from the pro-Kurdish opposition spectrum, including legal representatives and local politicians, across 21 cities in Türkiye, including Diyarbakır, İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, as was reported by the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The arrests were made 19 days before Türkiye's presidential and parliamentary elections, which are due to take place on 14.05.23. A further seven people were arrested on 03.05.23. Among those arrested are several candidates for the parliamentary elections. Another seven people were placed under house arrest and nine others were released on conditions. The detainees are accused of organizing and participating in women's protests, the May Day rally, and the Pride March, as well as of making preparations for these protests.

Report of the Journalists' Union

On 03.05.23, the Turkish Journalists' Union (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası, TGS) published a report on the situation of press freedom in Türkiye. During the reporting period between 2022 and 2023, at least 32 media workers were arrested, 96 physically assaulted and 43 verbally threatened. Currently, 47 journalists are held in prison for their journalistic activities. 80 percent of the detainees are accused of 'membership in an armed organisation'. 263 journalists were tried in 125 criminal cases in 2022, with 35 cases concluded and 63 journalists acquitted.

In addition, access to 4,148 news articles and 46 news websites was blocked during this period.

682 news articles were wholly or partially removed, and nine news articles were blocked in search engines.

15 May 2023

Presidential and parliamentary election results

According to the first provisional results of the presidential election held on 14.05.23, there will be a run-off after neither of the two leading candidates won an outright majority. About 99.38 percent of the votes have been counted so far. Presidential candidates need to win more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round to be declared winner. If no one passes this threshold, a run-off will be held in the coming weeks. According to the official election commission, incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the AKP, has so far secured around 49.42 percent of the vote. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), received 44.95 percent of the votes cast, while a third candidate, Sinan Ogan of the right-wing alliance Ata İttifakı (ATA Alliance, 'Alliance of Ancestors'), surprisingly gained around 5.2 percent of the votes. Erdoğan and Kilicdaroglu will now face each other in a run-off on 28.05.23.

Voters also cast their ballots for the 600 seats in the country's parliament. According to the official count, the AKP-led parliamentary bloc 'Republican Alliance' won almost half of the seats in parliament with 49.39 percent, while the CHP-led 'National Alliance' gained 35.14 percent of the seats. The left-wing 'Labour and Freedom Alliance', which was co-founded by the HDP, secured 10.53 percent of the seats. According to the election commission, the turnout was more than 88 percent of Türkiye's 64 million eligible voters.

22 May 2023

Presidential and parliamentary election results

In the first round of voting on 14.05.23, President Erdogan won 49.5 percent of the vote, falling short of the majority needed to avoid a run-off. Kilicdaroglu, the candidate of a six-party opposition alliance, secured 44.9 percent. The ultra-nationalist candidate Sinan Ogan received 5.2 percent of the vote and was thus eliminated. The run-off will take place on 28.05.23.

In the parliamentary elections, the AKP won 268 seats out of a total of 600, and the alliance it led, the 'People's Alliance', secured 322 seats and thus a majority in parliament. The largest opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), won 169 seats, and its alliance, the 'National Alliance', had 212 MPs. The pro-Kurdish HDP, which contested under the banner of the Green Left Party (YSP) due to a court ban, won 61 seats. Support for the AKP dropped by seven percentage points compared to its 2018 election results (42.6 percent).

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted that the elections were characterised by a high turnout, were well organised and offered voters political alternatives, but the incumbent president and the ruling parties enjoyed an unfair advantage. Ongoing restrictions on the fundamental rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression hindered the participation of some opposition politicians and parties, as well as civil society and independent media. The joint monitoring mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe found that the legal framework did not provide a sound basis for the conduct of democratic elections, saying that the government should not be favoured again in the media.

05 June 2023

Presidential elections and new cabinet

On 03.06.23, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was sworn in by parliament as the 12th president of Türkiye, beginning his third term in office. He won the run-off election on 28.05.23 with 52.18 of the votes against 47.82 percent for presidential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Following his re-election, Erdogan announced the composition of his new cabinet. Cevdet Yilmaz was appointed as the new vice president, replacing Fuat Oktay. New ministerial positions were also filled. Among others, the head of the national intelligence service (MIT), Hakan Fidan, was appointed as foreign minister, while former economy chief Mehmet Simsek became the new finance minister. Ali Yerlikaya, who served as governor of Istanbul for five years, was appointed as the new interior minister, replacing Süleyman Soylu.

Final election results of the parliamentary elections

On 30.05.23, Türkiye's supreme election council announced the final results of the parliamentary elections. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) became the strongest party in parliament with 268 seats, while its partners in the electoral alliance won 50 (Nationalist Movement Party, MHP) and five (New Welfare Party, YRP) seats. This gave the electoral alliance a majority of 323 out of a total of 600 seats in parliament. With 169 deputies, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and its coalition partner, the IYI party, secured a total of 212 seats in parliament, representing the main opposition party, the Nation Alliance. The remaining 65 seats in parliament were won by the Labour and Freedom Alliance, made up of the Green Left Party with 61 seats and the Türkiye Labour Party with four seats.

12 June 2023

HDP mayors arrested

On 09.06.23 Müserref Gecer and Emrah Kilic, the two co-mayors of the HDP of Patnos, were arrested in eastern Agri province. No reasons for the arrests have been made public. According to an HDP report, the Turkish government has removed a total of 48 HDP mayors from office since 2019 and appointed trustees in their place. Since the first appointment of a trustee in June 2019, a total of 72 HDP mayors have been arrested, and 15 of them remain in detention, according to the party.

Arrests on suspicion of links to the Gülen movement

Between 05.06.23 and 09.06.23, arrest warrants were issued for more than 90 people in several provinces for alleged links to the Gülen movement.

As part of an investigation launched by the Konya chief public prosecutor's office, arrest warrants were issued on 05.06.23 for 19 people, including businessmen and military officers. Some of them were accused of using the smartphone app ByLock. The Turkish police carried out operations in seven provinces and arrested 18 of the suspects.

In two further investigations, the Ankara public prosecutor's office issued arrest warrants on 06.03.23 for 30 people, including lawyers and former civil servants. The suspects are being sought.

A total of 19 people were arrested in nine provinces after the Izmir general prosecutor's office issued arrest warrants for 23 suspects, among them military officers and former military cadets. 15 of the suspects have been arrested.

On 09.06.23, the chief public prosecutor's office in Istanbul issued arrest warrants for a further 19 people, including medical doctors, nurses, teachers, and lawyers.

19 June 2023

Riots during Trans Pride parade

On 18.06.23, activists demonstrated in Istanbul against the discrimination of trans people. The Trans Pride had previously been banned by the authorities on the grounds that it threatened family values. Police set up large roadblocks to prevent marchers from demonstrating in the central Taksim Square. Metro connections to Taksim Square were also disrupted. According to the NGO Kaos GL, police violently attacked participants and media workers. Eight people were reportedly arrested. The governor of Istanbul, Davut Gül, had announced in a tweet on 16.06.23 that he would not allow any events that endangered the institution of the family. Authorities in other cities also issued bans on events related to Pride month, which is celebrated around the world every June to raise the visibility of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community (LGBTQI).

US report on human trafficking

The US State Department's 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, published on 15.06.23, criticises Türkiye's antitrafficking measures, noting that the government has so far failed to meet the minimum standards for combating human trafficking. In particular, the report criticises the insufficient prosecution and conviction of perpetrators. While the number of investigations into trafficking cases and prosecutions of defendants had increased since the previous reporting period, the courts continued to acquit most of the defendants. The report also criticised the fact that trafficking cases were often referred to general investigation departments that did not possess the necessary expertise to deal with these crimes. Efforts to protect victims were also found to be inadequate. Law enforcement agencies often misclassified these cases as lesser offences, such as 'encouragement of prostitution', resulting in lighter sentences for the perpetrators and undermining efforts to address the root causes of human trafficking.

26 June 2023

Arrests during Pride parade

At least 50 people were arrested by police during the annual Pride parade in Istanbul on 25.06.23. Ahead of the once again banned Pride march, police had barricaded access to both Istiklal Avenue, the regular meeting point for Pride marches, and the central Taksim Square. Roads in the area were also blocked, and public transport in the area was stopped. To avoid the roadblocks, hundreds of people carrying rainbow and transgender flags gathered in Mistik Park in the Sisli district instead. They chanted slogans while the organisers read out a Pride Week statement. The demonstration was violently dispersed by police. At least one person suffered head injuries, Amnesty International said.

In the coastal city of Izmir, the country's third largest city, police arrested at least 44 people on 25.06.23 after the authorities banned the Pride march.

