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Introduction

This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report was drawn up on the basis of the questions asked and points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Justice and Security.¹ The ToR for this COI Report were adopted on 28 June 2024. The ToR, together with the report, are available on the website of the Dutch Government.

This COI Report describes the situation in Türkiye insofar as this affects the assessment of asylum applications from persons originating from this country, and for decision-making regarding the return of rejected Turkish asylum seekers. It is an update of the COI Report from August 2023. The reporting period covers the period from September 2023 up to and including 20 February 2025.

The section on the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye has a different reporting period. Previously, this issue was included in the General COI Report on China. The most recent COI Report on China is dated December 2022. The reporting period with regard to the Uyghurs in Türkiye thus runs from December 2022 to 20 February 2025.

This report does not claim to be exhaustive with regard to individual security incidents and human rights violations; the incidents specifically mentioned are cited for the purpose of substantiating and illustrating a more general view.

This report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document, nor does it reflect the Dutch government's vision or policy in relation to any given country or region. The report does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

This COI Report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various sources, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reports from the European Country of Origin Information (COI) Services, specialist literature, media reporting and relevant government agencies. The content in this COI Report is based on multiple sources, except where the facts are generally undisputed or when stated otherwise. The text represents a synthesis of information from the various sources. Where qualifications are used, these can be traced back to the sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in Chapter 12 of this report.

A portion of the public sources consulted consisted of texts written in Turkish. These texts were translated into Dutch by the Translation Service of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The translations were published concurrently with this COI Report, but in a separate file. No rights may be derived from these translations, which were produced solely for informational purposes.

¹ Now known as the Ministry of Asylum and Migration.

Some of the confidential information used was obtained during a fact-finding mission to Istanbul and Ankara, which took place in November 2024. In addition, some of the information used was sourced from the Netherlands' foreign diplomatic missions in Ankara and Istanbul, and from confidential discussions and correspondence beyond the immediate context of the fact-finding mission. The information gleaned in this way was used primarily to support and augment passages based on publicly available information. The sources are listed as 'confidential source' in the footnotes, and are accompanied by a date. Where information from a single source is included, this is explicitly stated. This is information that is worth reporting, but could not be corroborated by other sources.

Chapter 1 covers the political context and developments, and particularly the local elections of March 2024. This chapter also describes the security situation in the country, and particularly the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) on Turkish soil. Chapter 2 covers the UYAP, a judiciary informatics system developed by the Turkish government. The third chapter describes the general human rights situation in Türkiye. Chapter 4 describes the situation of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists). Chapter 5 focuses on the position of Kurds and their political representatives, and particularly the left-progressive opposition party DEM. Chapter 6 examines the situation of other ethnic and religious minorities. The seventh chapter addresses the situation of women. Chapter 8 gives an account of the situation regarding sexual minorities (LGBTIQ+). Chapter 9 examines the issues associated with draft evaders and deserters. Chapter 10 outlines the position of irregular migrants, asylum seekers in general, and asylum status holders in Türkiye. Chapter 11 addresses the potential risks faced by Turkish citizens when returning to Türkiye (including instances of forced return). In conclusion, the twelfth chapter contains a list of abbreviations, foreign terms and a bibliography.

1 Country information

1.1 Political context

1.1.1 Introduction

During the preceding reporting period, Turkish politics were primarily shaped by the presidential and parliamentary elections held in May 2023. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan² won the presidential elections and was sworn in again as president of Türkiye in early June 2023. Led by the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP),³ the People's Alliance⁴ retained the majority in the Turkish parliament.⁵ President Erdoğan is the AKP party leader.⁶

1.1.2 Local elections

Local elections took place in Türkiye on 31 March 2024. Turnout was 78%,⁷ which was 6% lower than it had been in the previous local elections of March 2019.⁸ The *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party, CHP)⁹ is the country's largest opposition party. It received the most votes: 37.8%. The AKP won 35.5% of the vote.¹⁰ In addition to winning in the major cities (for example, Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir), the CHP won in parts of the interior, where the AKP had previously been the largest party.¹¹

Analysts and commentators traced the AKP's electoral defeat to several causes. The decline in support for the ruling party could be understood in part as an expression of dissatisfaction with the economic malaise and rising inflation.¹² Another significant factor was the electoral success of the *Yeniden Refah Partisi* (New Welfare Party, YRP).¹³ This party managed to win over a relatively large share of devout Muslims who had become dissatisfied with the AKP.¹⁴ With 6.2% of the vote, the YRP was the third largest party.¹⁵

² Sometimes abbreviated to 'RTE'.

³ The AKP is of conservative-Islamic persuasion.

⁴ Also known as the Public Alliance, it is referred to in Turkish as *Cumhur İttifakı*.

⁵ The full name of the Turkish parliament is *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, TBMM). Additional information on the TBMM is available at <https://global.tbmm.gov.tr>.

⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 9 and 13.

⁷ Bianet, *Turkey's local elections in numbers: AKP lost 195 municipalities, CHP doubled its presence*, 1 April 2024. Duvar English, *CHP wins 35 provincial municipalities in Turkey's local elections, AKP takes 24, says election council president*, 1 April 2024. Hürriyet Daily News (HDN), *YSK reveals preliminary results in local elections*, 1 April 2024.

⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, October 2019, p. 7.

⁹ Duvar English, *CHP wins 35 provincial municipalities in Turkey's local elections, AKP takes 24*, 1 April 2024.

¹⁰ The CHP seeks secular society.

¹¹ The Economist, *An electoral bruising for Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey*, 31 March 2024. POLITICO, *Turkey's Erdoğan suffers blow in crucial mayoral elections as secular opposition surges*, 1 April 2024.

¹² The Guardian, *Turkey's opposition party sweeps to local elections victory in snub to Erdogan*, 31 March 2024.

¹³ POLITICO, *Turkey's Erdoğan suffers blow in crucial mayoral elections as secular opposition surges*, 1 April 2024. Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (NRC), *Forse zege oppositie op Erdogan; Turkije Erdogans AKP is verzwakt, oppositie sterker*, 2 April 2024. Confidential source, 5 April 2024.

¹⁴ Financial Times (FT), *The mis-steps behind Erdoğan's electoral defeat*, 1 April 2024. Trouw, *Erdogan houdt touwtjes in handen ondanks nederlaag*, 3 April 2024. Confidential source, 5 April 2024. Al Jazeera, *Analysis, Ruling party errors give Turkey's opposition hope for future*, 16 April 2024.

¹⁵ The YRP stems from political Islam.

¹⁶ FT, *The mis-steps behind Erdoğan's electoral defeat*, 1 April 2024. Confidential source, 5 April 2024.

¹⁷ HDN, *YSK reveals preliminary results in local elections*, 1 April 2024.

The presidential and parliamentary elections of May 2023 were technically relatively efficient. The playing field between the ruling alliance and opposition parties was nevertheless uneven. For example, public broadcasters were clearly on the side of President Erdoğan and the People's Alliance.¹⁶

In local elections held in late March 2024, there seemed to be a similar dynamic.¹⁷ According to preliminary findings by the Council of Europe (CoE)¹⁸ these elections were well organised and conducted in technical terms.¹⁹ Once again, the playing field was uneven. Between 1 January and 10 February 2024, the Turkish state broadcaster TRT devoted 1,945 minutes (more than 32 hours) of airtime to the AKP, and 25 minutes to the CHP.²⁰

1.1.3 From HDP to DEM

The *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Democratic Peoples' Party, HDP)²¹ was a left-progressive opposition party that, amongst other things, advocated for the political and cultural rights of Kurds in Türkiye. Shortly before the May 2023 parliamentary elections, the HDP was in danger of being banned, and it decided to continue under the banner of the *Yeşil Sol Parti* (Green Left Party, YSP).²² The YSP was also on the left side of the political spectrum.²³

On 15 October 2023, the YSP held a party congress and decided to change its name to *Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, HEDEP).²⁴ Tülay Hatimoğulları²⁵ and Tuncer Bakırhan became the new co-chairs.²⁶ In the context of gender equality, the party has two co-chairs: one female and one male.²⁷

In November 2023, the Court of Cassation²⁸ ruled that the acronym 'HEDEP' was too similar to HADEP, a pro-Kurdish party that had been active from 1994 to 2003. In response, the party decided on 11 December 2023 to keep its full name, but to use the abbreviation 'DEM' from then on. This acronym refers to the concept of 'democracy', which is an element of the party name.²⁹

¹⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 14.

¹⁷ Confidential source, 1 April 2024.

¹⁸ In French, the CoE is known as the *Conseil de l'Europe*. Additional information on the CoE is available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/home>.

¹⁹ CoE, *Council of Europe Congress: Local elections in Türkiye overall well organised and respecting the will of the voters*, 1 April 2024.

²⁰ Bianet, *Public broadcaster TRT devotes 32 hours to the AKP but only 25 minutes to the CHP in 40 days*, 12 February 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish state TV allocated 1,945 minutes to ruling party, 25 minutes to main opposition*, 14 February 2024.

²¹ In Kurdish, *Partiya Demokratik a Gelan*.

²² In Kurdish, *Partiya Çep a Kesik*.

²³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 11.

²⁴ In Kurdish, *Partiya Wekhevî û Demokrasiyê ya Gelan*.

²⁵ Hatimoğulları identifies herself as an Arab, Alevi, socialist and feminist. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 53.

²⁶ HDP, *Green Left Party held its 4th Grand Congress, Co-chairs and party name changed*, 15 October 2023. Duvar English, *Opposition Green Left Party changes name, becoming more resemblant with HDP*, 15 October 2023. HDN, *YSP rebrands as HEDEP*, 15 October 2023. Bianet, *Green and Left Future Party renames itself HEDEP*, 16 October 2023.

²⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 53.

²⁸ In Türkiye, the Court of Cassation is the highest authority in criminal cases. Appeals are handled in regional courts. It is possible to appeal to the Court of Cassation. Confidential source, 10 February 2025. In Turkish, this court is colloquially known as *Yargıtay*. Additional information on the Court of Cassation is available at <https://www.yargitay.gov.tr>.

²⁹ Bianet, *Top court rejects new acronym for pro-Kurdish party*, 23 November 2024. Duvar English, *HEDEP to change abbreviation following top court's objection on 'similarity to closed pro-Kurdish party'*, 24 November 2023. Duvar English, *Turkey's pro-Kurdish HEDEP changes abbreviation upon top court's demand*, 11 December 2023.

In the run-up to the March 2024 local elections, DEM raised concerns about voter registration. According to this party, 54,000 voters were reportedly registered in south-eastern Türkiye, whereas they were domiciled elsewhere in the country. Many of these voters were reportedly working for the Turkish security apparatus. DEM feared that this would have a negative impact on its electoral performance in the south-east, where it had traditionally enjoyed strong support.³⁰ The party therefore protested against the registration of these 54,000 voters. District-level electoral councils countered with the claim of election fraud. They pointed out that security officials had been registered in south-eastern Türkiye to ensure that the elections in this part of the country were peaceful and safe. They also had to be given the opportunity to cast their vote.³¹

In the local elections of March 2024, DEM won 5.7% of the vote.³² Like the HDP and the YSP, this party received particularly strong support in the south-east of the country, where many Kurds live. Türkiye consists of a total of 81 provinces, and DEM became the largest party in 10 of them: Ağrı, Batman, Diyarbakır, Hakkâri, Iğdır, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Tunceli³³ and Van.³⁴ All these provinces are in south-eastern or eastern Türkiye.

After the elections, unrest erupted in the predominantly Kurdish-populated part of Türkiye. In the eastern Turkish city of Van, Abdullah Zeydan, the DEM mayoral candidate, had won with 55.48% of the vote. The provincial electoral council nevertheless decided that Zeydan was not eligible to run for mayor, as he had been incarcerated from 2016 to 2022 for criticising the Turkish armed forces. In response, the AKP candidate, who had received 27.15% of the vote, was awarded the mayoralty. This measure led to fierce protests, and DEM protested as well. On 3 April 2024, the *Yüksek Seçim Kurulu* (Supreme Election Council, YSK) reversed the measure and allowed Zeydan to take office after all.³⁵ In mid-February 2025, Zeydan had nevertheless been removed from office (see 5.4.3).

In response to the provincial electoral council's measure, thousands of people took to the streets. They clashed with the police, who deployed tear gas and water cannons against the protesters. On 4 April 2024, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced that 340 people had been arrested in 14 provinces: Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Batman, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, İzmir, Kocaeli, Mardin, Masina, Mersin, Şanlıurfa,³⁶ Şırnak and Van.³⁷

Additional information on the situation of DEM members and supporters is presented in 5.4.

³⁰ Bianet, *DEM Party: '54,000 voters transferred to the Kurdish provinces'*, 6 March 2024.

³¹ Duvar English, *Turkish election boards deny DEM Party's appeal over 54,000 alleged fraudulent voters*, 12 February 2024.

³² HDN, *YSK reveals preliminary results in local elections*, 1 April 2024.

³³ In Kurdish, *Dersim*.

³⁴ Duvar English, *'Red-wave' CHP storms Turkey's local elections according to unofficial results*, 1 April 2024.

³⁵ Duvar English, *DEM's Van mayor to AKP candidate: 'How will you attend weddings, condolences?'*, 2 April 2024. Al Jazeera, *Turkey's election authority reinstates pro-Kurdish mayoral election winner*, 3 April 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey's election council reinstates DEM candidate's mayoralty in Van*, 3 April 2024. Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS), *Koerdische winnaar in Turkse stad Van mag toch burgemeester worden*, 3 April 2024. Bianet, *Turkey's top election body restores DEM candidate's win in Van*, 4 April 2024. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), *Turkey reinstates pro-Kurdish election winner Zeydan after days of unrest in Van*, 4 April 2024. FT, *Turkish authorities yield to protesters over local election*, 4 April 2024. HDN, *Election watchdog reinstates DEM Party mayoral win in Van*, 4 April 2024.

³⁶ Referred to colloquially as 'Urfa'.

³⁷ Duvar English, *340 detained in 14 provinces in Turkey regarding protests on Van election*, 4 April 2024.

1.1.4 Calls for new constitution and rapprochement

During the preceding reporting period, President Erdoğan called several times for a new constitution to be drafted.³⁸ During the reporting period, he repeated this multiple times. In doing so, President Erdoğan stressed that the current constitution was rooted in the 1980 coup and that the country needed a constitution that was more 'civil' in nature.³⁹ At the time of writing, no draft version of the new constitution had yet been made public.⁴⁰

During the reporting period, the People's Alliance sought rapprochement with DEM. On 1 October 2024, Devlet Bahçeli – a political ally of President Erdoğan and leader of the ultra-nationalist *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Movement Party, MHP)⁴¹ – unexpectedly shook hands with several DEM MPs. He described this gesture as a call for national unity and brotherhood. Bahçeli had previously called for a ban on the HDP, the predecessor of DEM. President Erdoğan backed Bahçeli's attempt at rapprochement.⁴²

DEM showed willingness to negotiate a solution to the 'Kurdish issue'. It attached certain conditions to this. For example, the solitary confinement of Abdullah Öcalan – leader of the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) – had to be lifted (see 1.3.2 for additional information on the PKK). Further, DEM wanted Türkiye to recognise and execute certain rulings of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)⁴³ (see 3.2 for ECtHR rulings that Türkiye has ignored). Prison conditions also had to be improved (see 3.7.3 for more information on conditions in Turkish prisons). In addition, the country's political prisoners had to be released.⁴⁴

On 22 October 2024, Bahçeli indicated that Öcalan's solitary confinement could not be ended unless the PKK laid down its arms.⁴⁵ The next day, Ömer Öcalan – a cousin of Öcalan and a DEM MP – visited İmralı, the prison island in the Sea of Marmara where Öcalan has been detained since 1999. It was the first time since March 2020 that Turkish authorities had allowed a relative to visit Öcalan.⁴⁶ On the same day, the PKK carried out an attack near Ankara (see 1.3.2).⁴⁷

³⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 9.

³⁹ HDN, *Türkiye deserves brand new civilian charter, says Erdoğan*, 12 September 2023. Confidential source, 10 October 2023. HDN, *Erdoğan renews call for new constitution*, 18 September 2024. HDN, *Erdoğan pushes for new, civilian constitution*, 22 December 2024.

⁴⁰ Confidential source, 6 December 2024.

⁴¹ The MHP is also known as the 'Nationalist Action Party'.

⁴² HDN, *Handshake with DEM Party shows 'national unity': Bahçeli*, 8 October 2024. Al-Monitor, *Turkey mulls peace talks with Kurds amid fears of Israeli strike on Iran*, 10 October 2024. Duvar English, *Bahçeli, Erdoğan signal reconciliation with DEM Party with conditions*, 10 October 2024. Duvar English, *Erdoğan points to new constitution for possible new peace process with Kurds*, 13 October 2024.

⁴³ In French, *Cour européenne des droits de l'homme* (CEDH). Note that the official abbreviation for this court in English is ECHR. To avoid confusion with the European Convention on Human Rights, which has the same official abbreviation, the Court will be referred to as ECtHR throughout this report. Additional information on the ECtHR is available at <https://www.echr.coe.int>.

⁴⁴ Bianet, *Is Turkey heading toward a new peace process?, Pro-Kurdish DEM Party says 'We won't reject an extended hand'*, 19 October 2024. Duvar English, *DEM Party co-chair urges peace talks with jailed PKK leader Öcalan on Kurdish issue*, 19 November 2024.

⁴⁵ Al-Monitor, *In shift, Erdogan's top ally says Öcalan's life sentence can be reassessed if PKK disbands*, 22 October 2024. Bianet, *Erdoğan backs Bahçeli's dialogue initiative with Kurds as 'historic opportunity'*, 22 October 2024. Duvar English, *Bahçeli invites PKK leader Öcalan to parliament to 'end terrorism', hints at his potential release from prison*, 22 October 2024. HDN, *MHP leader calls on PKK to surrender arms*, 22 October 2024. Rûdaw, *MHP's Bahçeli calls for Öcalan to address parliament to dissolve PKK*, 22 October 2024.

⁴⁶ Bianet, *PKK leader Öcalan allowed for family visit for first time since 2020*, 24 October 2024. HDN, *Öcalan receives first prison visit in 43 months*, 25 October 2024.

⁴⁷ Bianet, *Pro-Kurdish DEM Party condemns Ankara attack amid debate over potential peace process*, 23 October 2024. Daily Sabah, *First time all relevant parties support process for terror-free Türkiye*, 24 October 2024. POLITICO, *Turkey's outlawed Kurdish rebel leader is back – thanks to his nemesis*, 24 October 2024. The New York Times, *Despite deadly attack, Turkey seeks opening with Kurdish militants*, 24 October 2024. ND, *Terreur verstoort toenadering tot PKK*, 25 October 2024. Trouw, *Kans op vrede met PKK weer onzeker na aanslag Ankara*, 25 October 2024. The Economist, *Turkey could soon strike a historic peace deal with the Kurds*, 31 October 2024.

The rapprochement process between the People's Alliance and DEM came under further pressure after three DEM mayors in south-eastern Türkiye were replaced by pro-government trustees on 4 November 2024 (see 5.4.3). DEM indicated that there could be no rapprochement if democratically elected officials were removed from office by the Turkish authorities.⁴⁸

On November 26, 2024, Bahçeli called for a direct conversation between Öcalan and DEM. The latter party expressed its willingness to contribute to a peaceful solution to the 'Kurdish issue' and the democratisation of Türkiye. On the same day, DEM applied to the Turkish Ministry of Justice to be allowed to visit Öcalan in prison.⁴⁹ A day later, President Erdoğan backed the MHP leader's appeal.⁵⁰ On 27 December 2024, Yılmaz Tunç, Turkey's Minister of Justice, announced that the DEM request had been granted.⁵¹

On 28 December 2024, Pervin Buldan and Sırrı Süreyya Önder – two DEM MPs – visited Öcalan. Afterwards, the DEM delegation expressed hope for the future. Öcalan had said that he wanted to make a positive contribution to a solution to the 'Kurdish issue'. He said that he had the skills and the will to be able to do so.⁵² Cevdet Yılmaz, Vice-President of Türkiye, Bahçeli and President Erdoğan welcomed the outcome of DEM's visit to Öcalan.⁵³

Meanwhile, the People's Alliance referred to the rapprochement process with the term 'terror-free Türkiye initiative'.⁵⁴ To build more support for this initiative, a DEM delegation visited several political parties – including the MHP, the AKP and the CHP – in early January 2025.⁵⁵

On 11 and 12 January 2025, the DEM delegation visited Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ in prison, where the two former co-chairs of the HDP had been detained since 2016. Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ also spoke positively and expressed their willingness to support the initiative.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Bianet, 'You can't discuss peace while appointing trustees', says dismissed Kurdish mayor, 4 November 2024. Duvar English, DEM Party co-chair Hatimoğulları: 'Internal peace impossible with trustees', 4 November 2024.

⁴⁹ Bianet, Bahçeli calls for direct talks between PKK leader Öcalan and pro-Kurdish DEM Party, 26 November 2024. HDN, MHP leader calls for immediate talks between DEM Party, PKK leader, 26 November 2024. Duvar English, Erdoğan's far-right ally pushes for Kurdish politician's meeting with jailed PKK leader, 27 November 2024.

⁵⁰ Bianet, Puzzling comment from Erdoğan on potential Öcalan-DEM dialogue, 27 November 2024. HDN, Erdoğan backs Bahçeli's call for DEM Party-PKK talks, 27 November 2024.

⁵¹ Al Jazeera, Türkiye to allow pro-Kurdish party to visit jailed PKK leader, 27 December 2024. Bianet, Ministry of Justice permits İmralı meeting, published on 27 December 2024, updated on 30 December 2024. Daily Sabah, Türkiye allows DEM Party to visit PKK's jailed leader Öcalan, 27 December 2024. Duvar English, Gov't allows pro-Kurdish DEM Party to visit jailed PKK leader Öcalan, 27 December 2024. HDN, Türkiye allows DEM party to meet jailed PKK leader Saturday, 28 December 2024.

⁵² Bianet, Öcalan: This is an era of peace, democracy and fraternity for Turkey and the region, published on 29 December 2024, updated on 30 December 2024. Daily Sabah, PKK's Öcalan confirms support for terror-free Türkiye initiative, 29 December 2024. Duvar English, Jailed PKK leader says ready to 'take necessary positive step', 29 December 2024. HDN, DEM Party delegation meets jailed PKK leader, 29 December 2024. Bianet, Buldan and Önder: We are much more hopeful compared to previous processes, 30 December 2024. FT, Turkey bets on jailed Kurdish militant to revive peace process, 30 December 2024. HDN, DEM Party 'more hopeful' after rare talks with Öcalan, 30 December 2024.

⁵³ Daily Sabah, Türkiye welcomes jailed PKK leader's support for terror-free push, 30 December 2024. Daily Sabah, Turkish govt ally says Öcalan's call spurs 'a good beginning', 31 December 2024. HDN, Bahçeli says Öcalan talks mark an 'auspicious beginning', 31 December 2024. Daily Sabah, Erdoğan hails terror-free Türkiye initiative for a good outcome, 5 January 2025.

⁵⁴ Daily Sabah, Terror-free Türkiye: An initiative to end PKK violence, 10 January 2025.

⁵⁵ Daily Sabah, DEM Party talks to govt ally as terror-free Türkiye plan gains pace, 2 January 2025. Duvar English, In a historic visit, MHP leader Bahçeli meets DEM Party politicians, 2 January 2025. HDN, DEM Party launches talks after meeting with Öcalan, 2 January 2025. Daily Sabah, Terror-free Türkiye push advances as DEM lawmakers meet AK Party, 6 January 2025. HDN, DEM Party engages in talks with AKP after Öcalan visit, 6 January 2025. Bianet, Meeting of İmralı Delegation and CHP Leader Özgür Özel begins, 7 January 2025. Daily Sabah, Main opposition cautiously endorses terror-free Türkiye initiative, 7 January 2025. Duvar English, Pro-Kurdish DEM Party visit parties after meeting with PKK leader, 7 January 2025. HDN, CHP pledges support for counter-terrorism efforts, 7 January 2025. Duvar English, Öcalan may call on PKK to disarm following talks in parliament, 8 January 2025.

⁵⁶ Duvar English, Jailed politician Demirtaş gives 'full support' to PKK leader Öcalan's peace efforts, 11 January 2025. Duvar English, DEM Party delegation visits jailed HDP co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ amid peace efforts, 12 January 2025. HDN, DEM Party delegation meets imprisoned ex-leader, 12 January 2025.

On 20 January 2025, the DEM party announced that it had submitted a written request to the Ministry of Justice for a second visit to Öcalan on İmralı.⁵⁷ On 22 January 2025, a DEM delegation visited Öcalan for the second time.⁵⁸

As the rapprochement process seemed to be gaining momentum, a five-day wave of arrests took place in February 2025. In the process, Turkish police arrested 282 PKK suspects in 51 different provinces, including Ankara, Diyarbakır and Istanbul. Those arrested included academics, journalists, human rights defenders, politicians and members of left-wing and pro-Kurdish opposition parties, such as DEM. One of those arrested was Yıldız Tar, a journalist and LGBTIQ+-rights activist.⁵⁹

1.2 Situation in the earthquake zone

During the preceding reporting period, severe earthquakes occurred in south-eastern Türkiye on 6 February 2023, killing more than 50,000 people.⁶⁰

The aftermath of the earthquakes continued to be felt during the reporting period. Ahead of the May 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections, President Erdoğan had promised to build 319,000 new homes within a year. By early February 2024 – about a year later – 46,000 homes had been completed for habitation, according to the Turkish Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change. Those who had not been able to move into any other housing were living in container dwellings. In early February 2024, the Red Cross estimated that 430,000 people were living in container dwellings. These container dwellings were scattered across eleven provinces that had been severely affected by the earthquakes. The same international aid organisation stated that hundreds of thousands of people in the earthquake zone remained dependent on aid.⁶¹

In early February 2025, two years after the earthquakes, the *Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı* (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, AFAD)⁶² announced that a total of 450,000 houses were in need of reconstruction and that 201,000 of them had already been reconstructed at that time.⁶³

⁵⁷ Bianet, *İmralı Delegation applies to Ministry for second Öcalan meeting*, 20 January 2025. HDN, *DEM Party group seeks second İmralı visit to Öcalan*, 20 January 2025.

⁵⁸ Daily Sabah, *Turkish lawmakers pay critical visit to jailed PKK leader Öcalan*, 22 January 2025. Duvar English, *DEM Party visits jailed PKK leader Öcalan for second time*, 22 January 2025.

⁵⁹ Al Jazeera, *Türkiye arrests 282 amid bid to reconcile with PKK*, 18 February 2025. Bianet, *Dozens detained in raids targeting pro-Kurdish, leftist groups*, 18 February 2025. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye captures 282 suspects in raids against PKK terrorists*, 18 February 2025. Duvar English, *Turkey detains around 300 people in raids on PKK suspects, including opposition figures and journos*, 18 February 2025. HDN, *Police detain 282 over suspected terror links*, 18 February 2025. Kaos GL, *KaosGL.org Editor-in-Chief Yıldız Tar detained*, 18 February 2025. Kaos GL, *Statement from Kaos GL Association: 'We demand the immediate release of Yıldız Tar'*, 18 February 2025. The Independent, *Turkey detains 282 suspects in a dayslong operation against Kurdish insurgents*, 18 February 2025.

⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 12.

⁶¹ The Independent, *A Turkish family is still afraid to go home one year after deadly earthquake*, 1 February 2024. The Guardian, *Still in ruins, The 2023 Turkish earthquake – then and now*, 2 February 2024. NRC, *Ook een jaar na de aardbeving in Turkije moet een moslim 'geduldig en dankbaar zijn'*, 5 February 2024. NOS, *Een jaar na de aardbevingen in Turkije: 'Ik denk dat we nog steeds in shock zijn'*, 6 February 2024.

⁶² Additional information on the AFAD is available at <https://en.afad.gov.tr>.

⁶³ Die Welt, *The fear of another quake, Two years after the severe earthquakes in Turkey, the Erdogan government boasts of rapid reconstruction, but the reality is very different*, 7 February 2025.

1.3 Security situation

1.3.1 Introduction

During the reporting period, three non-state actors committed politically motivated violence on Turkish soil: the PKK, the Islamic State (IS)⁶⁴ and the *Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi* (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front, DHKP/C). All three actors have been designated as terrorist organisations by both the European Union (EU) and the Turkish government. Turkish authorities refer to the PKK using the term *Bölücü Terör Örgütü* (Separatist Terrorist Organisation, BTÖ).

This section successively addresses the PKK, IS and the DHKP/C. In doing so, it focuses on the violence committed by each actor and how the Turkish authorities responded to it.

1.3.2 PKK

The PKK seeks self-administration for Kurds in countries where they reside. It has been waging an armed struggle against the Turkish state since 1984.⁶⁵ During the preceding reporting period, the PKK committed violence on Turkish soil on a limited scale.⁶⁶

This situation remained unchanged during the reporting period. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG),⁶⁷ one village guard,⁶⁸ one Turkish soldier, nineteen civilians and sixty PKK fighters were killed on Turkish soil between 1 September 2023 and 5 January 2025.⁶⁹ According to ICG data, the number of fatalities resulting from the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK decreased significantly during the period 2021–2024, except for a slight increase in 2022.⁷⁰ This trend is depicted in the graph below.

The following are a few examples of violent incidents taking place on Turkish soil during the reporting period. They should not be regarded as exhaustive.

On 4 August 2023, *Bianet*, an independent news platform that extensively addresses human rights issues,⁷¹ reported that Turkish soldiers and village guards had been fighting against PKK fighters in the south-eastern province of Şırnak. In the process, seven PKK fighters had reportedly been killed.⁷² On 29 October 2024, the pro-government *Daily Sabah* newspaper reported that the Turkish security apparatus had killed two PKK fighters in the south-eastern province of Siirt.⁷³

On 10 August 2023, Turkish soldiers arrested eight villagers in Söğütlü, a village in the south-eastern province of Bitlis. They were suspected of supporting the PKK. During their detention, one villager was reportedly tortured. He was said to have

⁶⁴ In Arabic, *Da'esh* and in Turkish, *DEAŞ*.

⁶⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 15.

⁶⁷ The ICG is an international NGO focusing on conflict prevention and resolution. Additional information on the ICG is available at www.crisisgroup.org.

⁶⁸ Village guards are Kurdish paramilitaries who fight alongside the Turkish armed forces in their campaign against the PKK. They are paid and armed by the Turkish state. In Turkish, village guards are referred to as *korucular* (singular: *korucu*). Gültan Kışanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics, Women politicians write from prison*, published in 2022, p. 147.

⁶⁹ ICG, *Fatalities Database, Türkiye & Northern Iraq / July 2015 – present*, consulted on 22 January 2025.

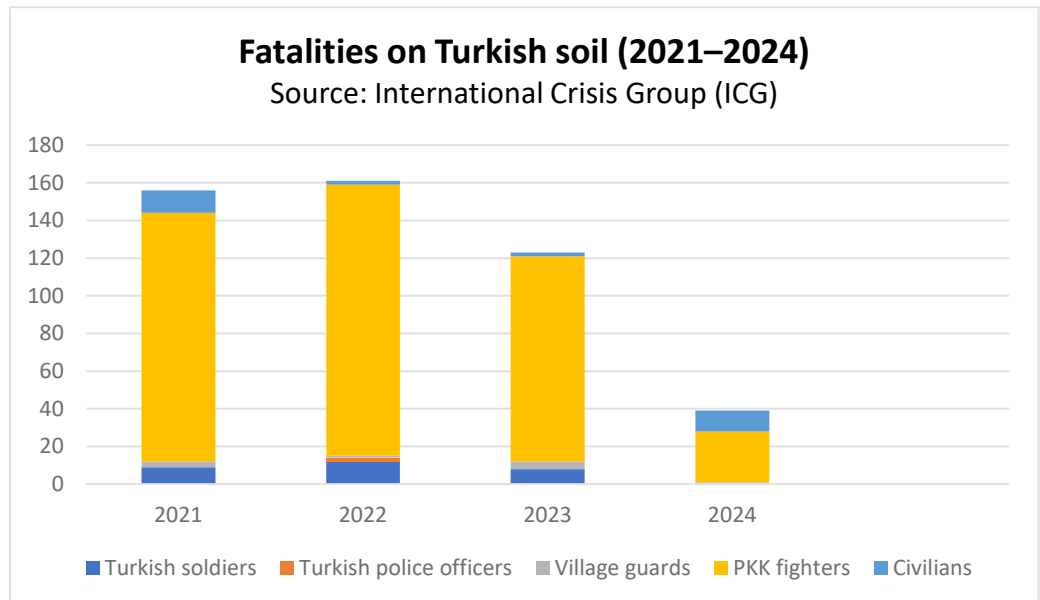
⁷⁰ ICG, *Fatalities Database*, consulted on 22 January 2025.

⁷¹ Additional information on *Bianet* is available at <https://bianet.org/english>.

⁷² *Bianet, Dead bodies of seven brought to hospital in Şırnak from the operation region*, 3 August 2023.

⁷³ *Daily Sabah, 2 most-wanted PKK terrorists eliminated in eastern Türkiye*, 29 October 2024.

suffered bruising to the face and two broken ribs as a result.⁷⁴ It was not clear from the reporting why these villagers were suspected of collaborating with the PKK. The frequency with which such incidents occurred is unclear.



On 13 November 2022, a bomb attack took place in Istanbul, killing six people and injuring 81. Although the Turkish authorities held the PKK responsible, it denied having carried out the attack. A day after the attack, Turkish police announced that the main suspect, a Syrian woman named Ahlam Albashir, had confessed to the attack.⁷⁵ On 26 April 2024, a Turkish court sentenced the woman to life in prison.⁷⁶ In late December 2024, the Turkish security apparatus arrested two people. They were suspected of assisting Albashir in her illegal entry, her transport to Istanbul and her hideout address.⁷⁷

On 1 October 2023, two attackers carried out a suicide attack near the parliament building in Ankara. In the process, one of the attackers blew himself up. Police fatally shot the other attacker. On the police side, two people were injured. The PKK claimed responsibility for the attack. The date seemed to have been chosen deliberately, as it was on this day that the summer recess would end and the Turkish parliament be back in session.⁷⁸

In the wake of the suicide attack in Ankara, the Turkish security apparatus undertook security operations across the country. According to Interior Minister Yerlikaya, 928 people had thereby been arrested on suspicion of the prohibited

⁷⁴ Bianet, *Villagers detained in Tatvan give their statements at gendarme station*, 14 August 2023.

⁷⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Bianet, *Court sentences suspects in 2022 Istanbul bombing case*, 26 April 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court convicts Syrian woman over fatal 2022 Istanbul bombing*, 26 April 2024. HDN, *İstiklal bomb attacker gets multiple life sentences*, 26 April 2024. NOS, *Syrische vrouw veroordeeld tot levenslang voor aanslag in Istanbul*, 26 April 2024. The Independent, *A Turkish court sentences a Syrian woman to life in prison for a bombing in Istanbul in 2022*, 26 April 2024.

⁷⁷ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye captures 2 PKK suspects for aiding İstiklal attack bomber*, 30 December 2024. HDN, *Türkiye nabs 2 terror suspects over links to 2022 İstiklal bombing*, 30 December 2024.

⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, *Turkey's Ankara hit by suicide blast*, 1 October 2023. NOS, *Agenten gewond bij zelfmoordaanslag Ankara, PKK eist verantwoordelijkheid op*, 1 October 2023. FT, *Turkey detains 20 people linked to Kurdish militants over Ankara bombing*, 2 October 2023.

possession and trafficking of arms, and 67 were suspected of having ties to the PKK. The number of PKK suspects arrested increased to ninety in early October 2023.⁷⁹

On 23 October 2024, two armed individuals, a man and a woman, attacked a defence company near Ankara. This company is owned by the Turkish state and is known as *Türk Havacılık ve Uzay Sanayii Anonim Şirketi* (Turkish Aerospace Industries, TUSAŞ).⁸⁰ Seven people were killed in the attack: one taxi driver, five TUSAŞ employees and the two attackers. In addition, 22 people were injured. The Turkish government held PKK responsible for the attack.⁸¹ On 25 October 2024, the PKK claimed responsibility for the attack. It also stated that the attack was separate from the process of rapprochement,⁸² as described in 1.1.4.

In the aftermath of the attack on the TUSAŞ complex, a wave of arrests followed across the country. Yerlikaya announced that 176 PKK suspects had been arrested in 31 provinces, from Izmir in the west to Kars in the east. One arrest in the eastern province of Mardin ended in a shootout, in which the suspect was killed.⁸³

Additional information on the treatment of relatives of PKK members is presented in 5.5.

1.3.3 IS(KP)

IS is a jihadist organisation. Between 2014 and 2017, IS carried out attacks in Türkiye. For example, Abdulkadir Masharipov, an Uzbek national and IS supporter, fatally shot 39 people in an Istanbul nightclub on 1 January 2017. In 2020, he was sentenced to forty times life in prison, with an additional 1,368 years.⁸⁴ On 21 January 2025, the Court of Cassation upheld the sentence of life in prison for Masharipov on appeal.⁸⁵

That the IS threat had not completely disappeared was evident on 28 January 2024. On this date, two attackers carried out an attack at the Saint Mary Church in Istanbul during Sunday Mass.⁸⁶ One churchgoer was killed in this attack. Turkish police arrested two suspects. They were Amirjon Khalikov,⁸⁷ a Tajik national, and David Tanduev, a Russian national. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, *Turkey detains 90 people over suspected PKK links after Ankara bomb attack*, 3 October 2023. NOS, *Turkse politie pakt honderden mensen op vanwege wapenbezit en banden met PKK*, 3 October 2023.

⁸⁰ Amongst other things, TUSAŞ produces drones and fighter-jet parts.

⁸¹ Al-Monitor, *At least 7 killed, 22 injured in attack on Turkey's defense company TUSAS*, 23 October 2024. Bianet, *Turkey's defense minister blames PKK for Ankara attack*, published on 23 October 2024, updated on 24 October 2024. Duvar English, *Attackers kill 5, injure 22 at Turkish aviation site*, 23 October 2024. The New York Times, *What we know about the militant attack in Turkey*, 24 October 2024.

⁸² Al Jazeera, *PKK claims attack on Turkish defence company near Ankara that killed five*, 25 October 2024. Al-Monitor, *PKK claims responsibility for TUSAS attack in Turkey's capital*, 25 October 2024. BBC, *Kurdish militant group behind attack on Turkish aerospace firm*, 25 October 2024. Bianet, *PKK claims Ankara attack, says it was not related to recent peace discussions*, 25 October 2024. NOS, *PKK eist aanslag bij luchtvaartbedrijf Turkije op*, 25 October 2024. The Independent, *Kurdish militants claim responsibility for deadly attack on Turkish defense firm*, 25 October 2024.

⁸³ Daily Sabah, *Hundreds of PKK suspects nabbed in nationwide raids after Ankara attack*, 25 October 2024. FT, *Turkey cracks down on Kurdish separatists after Ankara attack*, 25 October 2024.

⁸⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2021, p. 14.

⁸⁵ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye's supreme court upholds life sentences for Daesh shooter*, 21 January 2025. Duvar English, *Top Turkish court upholds jail sentences of 32 defendants for 2017 New Year nightclub shooting in Istanbul*, 21 January 2025.

⁸⁶ This place of worship is also known as the 'Italian church'.

⁸⁷ Also spelt 'Kholikov'.

⁸⁸ Bianet, *ISIS claims Saint Mary Church attack on Sunday*, 29 January 2024. De Standaard, *Dode bij aanval op Italiaanse kerk in Turkije*, 28 January 2024. NOS, *Twee verdachten opgepakt voor aanval in kerk Istanbul*, 28 January 2024. The New York Times, *Two masked attackers kill 1 in shooting at Istanbul church*, 28 January 2024. HDN, *Two suspects nabbed after shooting at Catholic church in Istanbul*, 29 January 2024. The New York Times, *Attackers kill man at an Istanbul church*, 29 January 2024. Nederlands Dagblad (ND), *Wat is er bekend over de aanslag op kerk Turkije?*, 30 January 2024. HDN, *Istanbul church reopens after deadly attack as 25 arrested*, 2 February 2024. Trend News Agency, *Türkiye reveals Tajik citizen's name suspected in Istanbul terrorist attack*, 3 February 2024.

Daily Sabah attributed the attack specifically to *Islamic State in Khorasan Province* (ISKP).⁸⁹ This is a regional branch of IS. *Khorasan* refers to the historical region roughly covering parts of present-day Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkmenistan. Supported by the 'parent organisation' IS, ISKP has the capacity to operate across borders.⁹⁰

The attack was followed by a wave of arrests, with 51 suspects detained. It became known that 23 people had not been involved in the attack. They were transferred to a deportation centre,⁹¹ where deportation proceedings were initiated. The remaining 28 people remained in custody and had to give a statement.⁹² From the coverage, the nationalities of the 23 people were not clear, nor was the reason why they were in danger of being deported.

On 15 September 2024, *Daily Sabah* reported that Viskhan Soltamatov, an ISKP member of Chechen origin, had been arrested. He had allegedly plotted the attack on the church in Istanbul and supplied weapons to the attackers.⁹³ The Public Prosecutor's Office called for him to be sentenced to life under an aggravated detention regime.⁹⁴ On 26 December 2024, the same newspaper reported that Turkish police had arrested another Chechen IS suspect.⁹⁵

1.3.4 DHKP/C

The far-left DHKP/C wants to establish a socialist state in Türkiye through armed struggle.⁹⁶

The most recent attack of the DHKP/C on Turkish soil had been in 2015. On 6 February 2024, a gun battle took place between two attackers and police at a checkpoint near a courthouse in Istanbul. The attackers, a man and woman, were identified as belonging to the DHKP/C. The fight killed both attackers, in addition to injuring three policemen and three civilians. One injured officer later succumbed to his injuries in hospital.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ *Daily Sabah*, *Alleged planner of Daesh church attack nabbed by Turkish intel*, 15 September 2024.

⁹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Afghanistan*, June 2023, pp. 17 and 18. NRC, *Nederland ook al twee keer doelwit IS-K*, 26 March 2024. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan*, 5 July 2024, p. 19.

⁹¹ Also known as a removal centre.

⁹² *Bianet*, *Church attack, 51 detained*, 29 January 2024.

⁹³ *Daily Sabah*, *Alleged planner of Daesh church attack nabbed by Turkish intel*, 15 September 2024. *Duvar English*, *Turkey arrests suspect behind ISIS Istanbul church attack plan*, 15 September 2024.

⁹⁴ *Duvar English*, *Turkish prosecutor seeks prison sentence for 43 suspects linked to ISIS Istanbul church attack*, 5 October 2024.

⁹⁵ *Daily Sabah*, *Interpol-wanted Chechen suspect linked to Daesh caught in Istanbul*, 26 December 2024.

⁹⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 14.

⁹⁷ *Al Jazeera*, *One person killed in attack on Istanbul courthouse*, 6 February 2024. *Bianet*, *Shooting attack in front of courthouse in İstanbul*, 6 February 2024. *The Independent*, *1 person killed and 2 assailants shot dead during an attack on a Turkish courthouse*, 6 February 2024.

2 UYAP

The National Judiciary Informatics System (*Ulusal Yargı Ağı Projesi*, or UYAP) is a legal-information system of the Turkish government. Various client groups can access the UYAP system, each through its own portal. For example, citizens have a Citizen Portal, and attorneys have an Attorney Portal.⁹⁸

During a criminal investigation, the accessibility of the documents in the UYAP depends on the nature of the case. If Turkish authorities have deemed the case 'sensitive',⁹⁹ the documents will not be accessible in the UYAP. If the case is not considered sensitive, however, the documents can be available for consultation in UYAP during the investigative phase. An authorised attorney may be given access to this system. This possibility does not apply to the Citizen Portal. Once the defendant has actually been charged and a criminal case has been initiated, the documents in the UYAP will be accessible to both the attorney and the defendant.¹⁰⁰

It is possible for a person against whom a criminal investigation or case is pending and about whom records are stored in UYAP to leave Türkiye legally. This is because criminal proceedings and the ability to travel out of the country legally are two different matters. Once a measure (for example, an exit ban or detention order) has been imposed, however, the person will not be able to leave the country legally.¹⁰¹

People returning to Türkiye whilst a criminal case is pending against them will be arrested upon their return, if a warrant has been issued.¹⁰² Additional information on the possible risks in case of return is presented in Chapter 11.

During the reporting period, media reports appeared about fraud in the UYAP. According to these reports, a network of corrupt attorneys and prosecutors existed in Türkiye. This network generated fictitious arrest or search warrants for Turkish asylum seekers in Europe or the United States (US) for a fee. Once the asylum application was granted, the fictitious order would be removed from the UYAP.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 18. Confidential source, October 2023.

⁹⁹ Examples could include an investigation into a senior Gülenist or Kurdish militant or politician.

¹⁰⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 18. Confidential source, October 2023. Confidential source, 11 September 2024. Confidential source, 12 February 2025.

¹⁰¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 18. Confidential source, 30 August 2024. Confidential source, 11 September 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

¹⁰² Confidential source, 30 August 2024. Confidential source, 11 September 2024.

¹⁰³ Tages-Anzeiger (TA), *Flucht in die Schweiz, Türken sollen mit falschen Haftbefehlen Asyl bekommen – SEM widerspricht*, 11 December 2023. Appenzeller Zeitung, *Asylschwindel mit falschen Haftbefehlen*, 11 December 2023.

3 Human rights (general)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the general human rights situation in Türkiye. In the preceding reporting period, it had been strained.¹⁰⁴ This situation continued into the reporting period,¹⁰⁵ as clarified in the following sections.

Section 3.2 describes the organisation of the judiciary in Türkiye and the extent to which it remained independent. Section 3.3 considers whether there were any changes with regard to laws and regulations in relation to the human rights situation. Section 3.4 explores the situation of human rights organisations and human rights defenders. Section 3.5 concerns freedom of expression and media freedom (including with regard to online media). In particular, it addresses the situation of Kurdish media and journalists, the effects of the Anti-Disinformation Law and criminal prosecution on the grounds of insulting the president. Section 3.6 examines exit bans. Section 3.7 provides an account of the reality of arrests and of the conditions in detention centres and prisons. Section 3.8 discusses assault and torture, as well as the extent to which citizens enjoy legal protection against such practices.

3.2 The judiciary

The *Hâkimler ve Savcılar Kurulu* (Council of Judges and Prosecutors, HSK)¹⁰⁶ is responsible for the selection and appointment of judges and prosecutors.¹⁰⁷ The functioning of the HSK is set out in the Law of Council of Judges and Prosecutors (Law No. 6087). The Law for Judges and Prosecutors (Law No. 2802) sets out how judges and prosecutors should be hired.¹⁰⁸

The highest court in Türkiye, the *Anayasa Mahkemesi* (Constitutional Court, AYM)¹⁰⁹ consists of fifteen members. President Erdoğan has appointed ten of them, his predecessor Abdullah Gül appointed two, and the Turkish parliament has appointed three. The term of office for members of the AYM is twelve years.¹¹⁰

The independence of the judiciary is enshrined in the Turkish constitution. During the reporting period, the rule of law in Türkiye was under pressure.¹¹¹ Political influence on the judiciary manifested itself in several ways. Several examples are presented below by way of illustration. These are used solely for illustrative purposes and should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

During the reporting period, lower courts did not always carry out the decisions of the AYM. In Can Atalay's case, this led to a legal-political power struggle between the AYM and the Court of Cassation. In the May 2023 parliamentary elections,

¹⁰⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Agos, *A worrying year for rights*, 9 February 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Additional information on the HSK is available at <https://www.cjp.gov.tr>.

¹⁰⁷ Confidential source, 4 December 2024. CJP, *About us*, undated, consulted on 5 December 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Additional information on the AYM is available at <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/en/home-page/>.

¹¹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 35. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

¹¹¹ Committee against Torture (CAT), *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 11. Confidential source, 3 September 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

Atalay was elected MP for the southern province of Hatay on behalf of the *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Workers' Party of Türkiye, TİP).¹¹² In 2022, however, he had been sentenced to eighteen years in prison for his involvement in the anti-government protests of 2013.¹¹³ Although parliamentarians are inviolable in Türkiye, the Turkish authorities did not release him. On 25 October 2023, the AYM ruled that Atalay's rights had been violated and that he should be released immediately. The lower court, which had to implement the decision, disregarded the ruling. On 8 November 2023, the Court of Cassation annulled the AYM's decision. In doing so, the Court of Cassation did not recognise the supreme authority of the AYM. The Court of Cassation further filed charges against the members of the AYM who had ruled in favour of Atalay. The actions of the Court of Cassation sent shockwaves through the judicial and political order of Türkiye. The chair of the *Türkiye Barolar Birliği* (Union of Turkish Bar Associations, TBB)¹¹⁴ spoke of a 'clear rebellion against the constitutional order'.¹¹⁵ The Turkish parliament decided to revoke Atalay's parliamentary status based on the Court of Cassation's ruling.¹¹⁶

On 1 August 2024, the Government's *Official Gazette* published¹¹⁷ an AYM decision that annulled the revocation of Atalay's parliamentary status.¹¹⁸ Following this decision, on 5 August 2024, the TİP submitted a request to the Turkish parliament to restore Atalay's parliamentary status.¹¹⁹ At the time of writing, the TİP had not yet received a response to its request.¹²⁰

In September 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) requested the Turkish government for clarification regarding Atalay's continued detention. The ECtHR wanted Türkiye to indicate whether Atalay's rights had been violated. The request concerned Atalay's right to freedom and the security of his own person, as well as the right to vote and be elected.¹²¹ At the time of writing, Türkiye was still drafting a response.¹²²

In preceding reporting periods, Türkiye had disregarded some ECtHR rulings. For example, in December 2019, the ECtHR had ruled that Osman Kavala, an activist, philanthropist and businessman, was being detained unlawfully. This ruling did not deter Turkish authorities from keeping him in detention.¹²³

¹¹² The TİP is a left-wing opposition party. Additional information on the TİP is available at <https://tip.org.tr/en/>.

¹¹³ In 2013, environmental activists launched a local protest against urban development plans for Gezi Park, one of the few green spaces in the heart of Istanbul. This protest ignited a wave of anti-government demonstrations throughout the country, involving countless people with a wide range of beliefs, backgrounds, and motivations. The protests were met with a heavy-handed response from the Turkish security apparatus, resulting in the deaths of eleven people and leaving thousands of others injured.

¹¹⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ Additional information on the TBB is available at <https://www.barobirlik.org/tr/en#>.

¹¹⁶ Confidential source, 10 November 2023.

¹¹⁷ Bianet, *Can Atalay loses MP status*, 30 January 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish gov't ally Bahçeli once again calls for closure of Constitutional Court*, 10 February 2024. Confidential source, 3 September 2024.

¹¹⁸ The Turkish Government's Official Gazette is referred to in Turkish as *Resmî Gazete*.

¹¹⁹ Bianet, *Constitutional Court declares revocation of Can Atalay's MP status 'null and void'*, 1 August 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey's Constitutional Court rules parliament's decision to strip jailed opposition MP's status unlawful*, 1 August 2024.

¹²⁰ Duvar English, *TİP submits parliamentary application for Atalay upon AYM ruling*, 6 August 2024.

¹²¹ Confidential source, 6 December 2024.

¹²² Bianet, *European court demands response from Turkey over imprisoned MP Can Atalay*, 16 September 2024.

¹²³ Confidential source, 6 December 2024.

¹²⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 22 and 23.

The situation described above persisted into the reporting period.¹²⁴ On 28 September 2023, the Court of Cassation upheld Kavala's life sentence on appeal.¹²⁵ On 13 October 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)¹²⁶ called on Türkiye to release Kavala immediately. In this call, PACE described Kavala's detention as 'unlawful'.¹²⁷ The Turkish foreign ministry described PACE's call as a 'historic mistake'.¹²⁸

Another ECtHR ruling that Türkiye disregarded during the reporting period concerned a Gülenist teacher named Yüksel Yalçınkaya. This case is discussed in further detail in 4.4.

For the political opposition and the independent media, the actions of the public prosecutor Akın Gürlek also raised concerns about the functioning of the Turkish rule of law. Özgür Özel, the leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), described him as a 'mobile guillotine'. This description referred to Gürlek moving from one district to another, each time proceeding with the criminal prosecution of prominent dissidents. As the chief prosecutor in Istanbul, he oversaw the criminal case against Ahmet Özer, the CHP mayor of Esenyurt, a district in western Istanbul (see 5.4.3 for additional information on this case).¹²⁹

On 20 January 2025, police detained Cem Aydın, the leader of the CHP's youth wing, as part of a criminal investigation. Aydın had repeated on social media the notion of a 'mobile guillotine' in relation to Gürlek. In response, he was charged with insulting a public servant in office and targeting officials. A travel ban was imposed on Aydın (additional information on travels bans is provided in 3.6).¹³⁰

The critical journalist Furkan Karabay devoted some articles and social media posts to the criminal cases in which Gürlek had been involved. Following this, Karabay was charged with insulting a public servant in office, spreading disinformation and targeting officials.¹³¹ Additional information on freedom of the press is presented in 3.5.

Additional information concerning the extent to which citizens had access to legal protection is provided in 3.8.

3.3 Legislation and regulations

As far as is known, no new laws were passed during the reporting period that had a direct impact on the human rights situation in the country.¹³²

¹²⁴ Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹²⁵ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye's Court of Appeals upholds ruling in Gezi protests case*, 28 September 2023. Duvar English, *Turkey's top appeals court upholds sentences for five defendants in Gezi Park trial including MP Atalay*, 28 September 2023. Trouw, *Bekendste Turkse gevangene, Osman Kavala, moet levenslang in de cel blijven*, 30 September 2023.

¹²⁶ In French, PACE is known as *l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe* (APCE). Additional information on PACE is available at <https://pace.coe.int/en/>.

¹²⁷ CoE, *PACE calls on Türkiye to 'immediately release Osman Kavala who remains unlawfully detained'*, 13 October 2023.

¹²⁸ Daily Sabah, *European resolution for release of convict Kavala angers Türkiye*, 13 October 2023.

¹²⁹ Bianet, *Who is Akın Gürlek, the top judicial official dubbed as 'mobile guillotine' by Turkey's opposition?*, 7 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

¹³⁰ Bianet, *CHP Youth Branches' Chairperson detained for 'Akın Gürlek' post*, 20 January 2025. Duvar English, *CHP youth branch head faces investigation for criticizing Istanbul prosecutor*, 20 January 2025. Türkiye Today, *Turkish main opposition youth leader detained for insulting public official*, 20 January 2025.

¹³¹ Bianet, *Journalist Furkan Karabay detained in dawn raid after criticizing chief prosecutor*, 8 November 2024.

¹³² Bianet, *Journalist Furkan Karabay arrested over reporting, social media posts about municipal takeovers*, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹³³ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

With regard to laws and regulations, the following can further be mentioned. On 13 October 2022, the Turkish government further tightened legislation regarding social media. The package of measures came to be known as the 'Anti-Disinformation Law'. This series of amendments made the public dissemination and placement of disinformation a punishable offence. The phrasing of this act does not specify the definition of 'disinformation'. The political opposition and civil society expressed criticism of the Anti-Disinformation Law and spoke of a 'censorship law'.¹³³

On 18 October 2022, the CHP filed a request in the Constitutional Court (AYM) to repeal the Anti-Disinformation Law of 13 October 2022.¹³⁴ On 8 November 2023, the AYM rejected the above request. The Anti-Disinformation Law thus remained in force.¹³⁵ The effects of this law on freedom of the press are addressed in 3.5.2.

During the reporting period, bills circulated to tighten the already existing anti-espionage law. These were from the country's ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The central concept of these bills was that of an 'Agent of Impact' or an 'Agent of Influence'. These concepts refer to a person acting at the behest of a foreign actor or in line with the interests of a foreign actor, and threatening the security and political interests of the Turkish state. A convicted Agent of influence could be sentenced to up to twelve years in prison.¹³⁶ The political opposition and civil society expressed concern about the bill, fearing that it would further restrict the space for critical voices to be heard. The Turkish parliament rejected the bill in June 2024. In November 2024, the parliament rejected the proposal for a second time.¹³⁷

3.4 Human rights organisations and human rights defenders

As stated in the preceding COI Report, human rights organisations in Türkiye were under pressure. For example, they were subject to heightened financial supervision under the Law on Preventing the Spread and Financing of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Law 7262, for short). This law created a culture of fear amongst human rights organisations, and it severely strained their capacity. This was because cooperating with inspections under Law 7262 was time-consuming and labour-intensive.¹³⁸ This situation persisted into the reporting period.¹³⁹

Turkish authorities also used the Law on Preventing the Spread and Financing of Weapons of Mass Destruction to criminally prosecute individuals who had transferred money to political prisoners. These individuals were suspected of 'financing terrorism'. On 7 March 2024, the *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association, İHD)¹⁴⁰ issued a statement against the criminal prosecution of individuals who had transferred money to prisoners. In this statement, the İHD made it clear that, amongst other things, prisoners had received and spent the

¹³³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 20 and 21. Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

¹³⁴ Bianet, *CHP applies to top court demanding annulment of key article of 'censorship law'*, 18 October 2022. HDN, *CHP submits disinformation law to Constitutional Court for annulment*, 18 October 2022.

¹³⁵ Associated Press (AP), *Turkish high court upholds disputed disinformation law, The opposition wanted it annulled*, 8 November 2023. Duvar English, *Turkish Constitutional Court rejects request to annul 'disinformation law'*, 8 November 2023. HDN, *Top court rejects to cancel prison term regulation of disinformation law*, 10 November 2023.

¹³⁶ Confidential source, 3 June 2024. Confidential source, 9 November 2024.

¹³⁷ Bianet, *AKP postpones 'agents of influence' bill to consult opposition*, 13 November 2024. HDN, *Parliament pulls espionage bill article for revision*, 13 November 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish gov't withdraws 'agents of influence' bill*, 14 November 2024. Daily Sabah, *Bill modifying Türkiye's anti-espionage law withdrawn at Parliament*, 15 November 2024.

¹³⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 22.

¹³⁹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹⁴⁰ In Kurdish, the İHD is known as *Komeleya Mafên Mirovan*. Additional information on the İHD is available at <https://ihd.org.tr/en/>.

money under the supervision of prison staff. For that reason alone, there could not have been any 'financing of terrorism', according to the İHD.¹⁴¹

Action groups and organisations concerned with human rights (whether directly or indirectly) drew the negative attention of the Turkish authorities in other ways as well.¹⁴² Several examples are presented below by way of illustration. These examples should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

During the reporting period, the *Tarlabaşı Toplum Merkezi* (Tarlabaşı Community Center, TTM) came under the negative attention of Turkish authorities. The TTM was located in Beyoğlu-Tarlabaşı, a district in Istanbul. Poverty, discrimination and gender inequality prevailed in this neighbourhood. The TTM provided support to marginalised groups (for example, women and children).¹⁴³ When this community centre for children wanted to offer a workshop on sexuality and gender, it was accused of spreading 'LGBT propaganda'. In response, the authorities filed two lawsuits against the TTM, seeking to dissolve the centre. In one lawsuit, the TTM was accused of leading a 'sham existence'. This lawsuit was dismissed in mid-2024. The other suit asked the court to dissolve the TTM for 'legal and ethical violations'. At the time of writing, this case was ongoing.¹⁴⁴

During the reporting period, the situation of the Saturday Mothers¹⁴⁵ stood out. This protest movement meets every Saturday at Galatasaray Square in Istanbul. It then peacefully calls attention to the people who went missing in the 1990s as a result of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). In 1995, the Saturday Mothers held their first vigil.¹⁴⁶ The group had initially consisted of mothers of mainly left-wing, Kurdish activists who had gone missing. Today, the children and grandchildren of the first generation of Saturday Mothers have joined, and the movement is also known as 'Saturday People'. The Saturday Mothers have gradually extended their protest to include other victims. For example, they call for attention to missing village guards and government soldiers.¹⁴⁷

As noted in the preceding COI Report, the Saturday Mothers were repeatedly detained, handcuffed, taken away and released by police.¹⁴⁸ During the reporting period, they were given limited space to demonstrate in Galatasaray Square in Istanbul on Saturday. They were allowed to come with no more than ten people to protest in the square.¹⁴⁹

As during the preceding reporting period,¹⁵⁰ human rights defenders attracted the negative attention of the Turkish authorities. They were subjected to criminal investigations, fines and imprisonment.¹⁵¹ On 20 September 2023, the *Türkiye*

¹⁴¹ İHD, *Sending money to prisoners is not a crime*, 7 March 2024.

¹⁴² Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹⁴³ Additional information on the TTM is available at <https://www.tarlabaşi.org/en/>.

¹⁴⁴ Kaos GL, *TTM case, The Interior Ministry lawyer alleges that the association is engaged in 'LGBT propaganda' and requests its annulment*, 7 May 2024. Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), *How Tarlabaşı Community Center became a target*, 10 June 2024. Kaos GL, *Tarlabaşı Community Center sealed*, 10 October 2024. Kaos GL, *Closure case against Tarlabaşı Community Center postponed to 2025*, 21 October 2024. Confidential source, 15 February 2025.

¹⁴⁵ In Turkish, the movement is referred to as *Cumartesi Anneleri*.

¹⁴⁶ The Saturday Mothers were inspired by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. They had called attention to the victims of the Argentine military dictatorship in a similar manner (1976–1983).

¹⁴⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 36. Ercan Şen, Elif Sandal-Önal, Mete Sefa Uysal and Yasemin Gülsüm Acar (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey, Critical perspectives on identity, narratives, and resistance*, published in 2023, pp. 32, 129–134 and 138.

¹⁴⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 36.

¹⁴⁹ Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹⁵⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 22–24.

¹⁵¹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

İnsan Hakları Vakfı (Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye, TİHV)¹⁵² published a report indicating that, in 2022, board members, staff and/or members of at least 22 civil society organisations had been criminally investigated or prosecuted.¹⁵³ According to the TİHV and the Human Rights Association (İHD), at least 76 members (or board members) of human rights organisations had been detained, and 22 had been imprisoned in the first 11 months of 2024.¹⁵⁴

One case that stood out concerned Şebnem Korur Fincancı. In the preceding reporting period, she had already experienced problems with the Turkish authorities. She was both the head of the *Türk Tabipleri Birliği* (Turkish Medical Association, TTB)¹⁵⁵ and a board member of the TİHV. In October 2022, Fincancı had made a critical remark about Turkish forces in northern Iraq. In response, in January 2023, she was sentenced to prison for two years, eight months and fifteen days for disseminating terror propaganda.¹⁵⁶ On 27 January 2024, a court declared her appeal unfounded.¹⁵⁷ According to one source, it is likely that her appeal was pending before the Court of Cassation at the time of writing.¹⁵⁸ In response to a court ruling, the entire TTB board, including Fincancı, had already been removed from office in late November 2023.¹⁵⁹

One source was aware of a human rights activist who had given a speech in south-eastern Türkiye in 2016, following an escalation of violence between the Turkish state and the PKK. In 2022, authorities decided to launch a criminal investigation following this speech. During the investigation, the activist's phone calls were tapped, and the bank accounts and social media accounts of the activist were searched. According to the source, in 2024, the authorities ended the investigation and decided not to take further steps.¹⁶⁰

Information on the situation in terms of women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights is presented in 7.4 and 8.2, respectively.

During the preceding reporting period, relatives of human rights defenders were disadvantaged by the Turkish authorities.¹⁶¹ This situation persisted into the reporting period. For example, relatives of human rights defenders could be thwarted in their efforts to become civil servants, academics or doctors.¹⁶² In some cases, the authorities forced relatives of imprisoned human rights defenders to act as informants.¹⁶³ The scale on which such practices took place remained unclear.

¹⁵² In Kurdish, the TİHV is known as *Weqfa Mafên*

Mirovan a Tirkîyê. Additional information on the HRFT is available at <https://en.tihv.org.tr>.

¹⁵³ Bianet, *HEDEP deputy submits bill for protection of human rights advocates*, 19 October 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Artı Gerçek, *2024 yılında hak ihlali bilançosu... Hem içerde, hem dışarda: Hak ihlalleri 'kaygı verici' boyutta* ('Overview of human rights violations in 2024, both in prisons and on the streets: Human rights violations are at a "alarming" level'), 10 December 2024.

¹⁵⁵ The TTB is a professional association for physicians. Additional information on the TTB is available at <https://www.ttb.org.tr>.

¹⁵⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 31 and 32.

¹⁵⁷ Anadolu Ajansı (AA), *Istinaf, TTB Başkanı Fincancı'ya verilen 2 yıl 8 ay 15 günlük hapis cezasını onadı* ('The regional court confirmed prison terms of 2 years, 8 months and 15 days for Fincancı, the president of the Turkish Medical Association'), 27 January 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court upholds prison sentence for Medical Association chair Fincancı*, 28 January 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Confidential source, 9 December 2024.

¹⁵⁹ BBC, *TTB davasında karar: Merkez Konseyi görevden alındı* ('Verdict in TTB case: The Central Board of Directors was deposed'), 30 November 2023. Bianet, *Court rules for removal of Turkish Medical Association leadership in 'chemical warfare' case*, 1 December 2023.

¹⁶⁰ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

¹⁶¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 24.

¹⁶² Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

¹⁶³ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

3.5 Freedom of the press and freedom of expression

3.5.1 Introduction

During the preceding reporting period, freedom of the press and freedom of expression were under pressure.¹⁶⁴ This situation persisted during the reporting period.¹⁶⁵ On the press freedom index of *Reporters sans frontières* (Reporters Without Borders, RSF),¹⁶⁶ Türkiye was ranked 158th in 2024. This ranking includes a total of 180 countries.¹⁶⁷

During the reporting period, the number of jailed journalists in Türkiye decreased. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an American NGO working for press freedom and journalists' rights,¹⁶⁸ the number of journalists imprisoned in Türkiye dropped from forty in 2022 to thirteen in 2023.¹⁶⁹ According to the Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Türkiye Human Rights Foundation (TİHV), in the first eleven months of 2024, 43 journalists had been detained and 11 had been imprisoned.¹⁷⁰ *Bianet*, an independent news platform that extensively addresses human rights issues, reported that at least ten journalists were in prison as of 2024. In the same year, authorities detained 57 reporters and YouTube journalists. They were detained while covering various events, including celebrations of *Newroz* (Kurdish New Year) and Labour Day (see 3.7.2). The detained journalists were usually released on parole, with travel bans (see 3.6), reporting obligations or house arrest imposed on them.¹⁷¹

The fact that fewer journalists were in jail did not mean that press restraint had decreased in intensity. Turkish authorities continued unabated with their arrest and criminal prosecution of critical and independent journalists.¹⁷² According to the International Press Institute (IPI), an NGO committed to press freedom,¹⁷³ 207 journalists were criminally prosecuted in Türkiye in 2023. Data from IPI did not indicate how often a criminal case had resulted in conviction or acquittal.¹⁷⁴

As during the preceding reporting period,¹⁷⁵ Kurdish media and journalists in particular attracted the negative attention of the Turkish authorities. Authorities conducted raids on news outlets and repeatedly blocked Kurdish news pages and internet domains. Kurdish journalists were under constant criminal investigation and detention.¹⁷⁶ Within this context, Serdar Altan noted that, as soon as the authorities

¹⁶⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 25–27.

¹⁶⁵ Confidential source, 4 November 2024. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025.

¹⁶⁶ RSF is an international NGO dedicated to freedom of the press. Additional information about RSF is available at <https://rsf.org/en>.

¹⁶⁷ RSF, *Türkiye, Country fact-file*, undated, consulted on 6 December 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Additional information on the CPJ is available at <https://cpj.org>.

¹⁶⁹ CPJ, *Drop in jailed Turkish journalists belies a long-simmering press freedom crisis*, 13 February 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Artı Gerçek, *2024 yılında hak ihlali bilançosu... Hem içerde, hem dışarda ('2024 Overview of human rights violations in 2024, both in prisons and on the streets')*, 10 December 2024.

¹⁷¹ *Bianet, The government made journalists' lives a living hell in 2024*, 24 January 2025.

¹⁷² *Bianet, RSF: Turkey arrested 43 journalists in 2023*, 14 December 2023. CPJ, *Drop in jailed Turkish journalists belies a long-simmering press freedom crisis*, 13 February 2024.

¹⁷³ Additional information on the IPI is available at <https://ipi.media>. The IPI has a project known as #FreeTurkeyJournalists, which focuses specifically on the situation of journalists in Türkiye. Additional information on this project is available at <https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/>.

¹⁷⁴ IPI, *#FreeTurkeyJournalists, Turkey's press freedom violations in numbers*, undated, consulted on 6 December 2024.

¹⁷⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 26 and 27.

¹⁷⁶ *Bianet, RSF: Turkey arrested 43 journalists in 2023*, 14 December 2023. CPJ, *Drop in jailed Turkish journalists belies a long-simmering press freedom crisis*, 13 February 2024. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025.

released a Kurdish journalist on parole, they detained another journalist.¹⁷⁷ Altan is the co-chair of the Dicle Firat Journalists Association, a journalists' association based in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir.¹⁷⁸

The following examples of the repression of Kurdish media and journalists are for illustrative purposes only and cannot be considered exhaustive.

On 8 March 2024, X (formerly known as Twitter) closed the Kurdish-language account of JINHA, a news agency of Kurdish and Yazidi women, at the request of the Turkish government.¹⁷⁹ In JINHA's view, the date of closure, which coincided with International Women's Day, was no coincidence.¹⁸⁰

On 12 March 2024, Turkish authorities blocked the website of the *Mezopotamya Agency* (MA), a Kurdish news platform.¹⁸¹ This is because the website was said to pose a threat to state security and public order. In response, the MA was forced to change its internet domain.¹⁸²

On 23 April 2024, Turkish police detained nine Kurdish journalists in three different cities: Ankara, Istanbul and Şanlıurfa. On 26 April 2024, six journalists were paroled and three were placed in pre-trial detention. They were suspected of membership of a terrorist organisation, which within this context referred to the PKK.¹⁸³

During the reporting period, critical and dissonant reports on the following topics in particular attracted the negative attention of the Turkish authorities: President Erdoğan and his family, military operations of the Turkish armed forces,¹⁸⁴ the political and cultural rights of the Kurdish minority, the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, the late Gülen and his followers, Islam, LGBTIQ+ people, government action in the earthquake zone and allegations of corruption by government employees.¹⁸⁵

One example of a dissonant report on Islam, which attracted the negative attention of the Turkish authorities during the reporting period, concerned a critical remark made by Diamond Tema on Sharia law. This YouTuber was described in the media alternately as an atheist or an agnostic. In June 2024, he claimed that the Prophet Muhammad had entered into a marriage with a six-year-old girl within the framework of Sharia law. His utterance led to outcry on social media. Turkish authorities issued an arrest warrant against him for inciting public hatred and enmity. Tema had both Turkish and Albanian citizenship, and he fled to Albania before the arrest warrant was issued. The Istanbul Bar Association rejected Tema's

¹⁷⁷ CPJ, *Drop in jailed Turkish journalists belies a long-simmering press freedom crisis*, 13 February 2024.

¹⁷⁸ This association is committed to freedom of the press and provides legal and psychological support to journalists. In Turkish, *Dicle Firat Gazeteciler Derneği* (DFG).

¹⁷⁹ Yazidis constitute a distinct ethno-religious minority. Most of them speak the *Kurmandji* variant of the Kurdish language and practice syncretic religious traditions. Additional information on JINHA is available at <https://jinhaagency.com/en>.

¹⁸⁰ JINHA, *Jinnews' Kurdish X account suspended*, 8 March 2024. Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 December 2024.

¹⁸¹ In Turkish, the MA is known as *Mezopotamya Ajansı*. Among identity-conscious Kurds in Türkiye, it is common to refer to the original homeland of the Kurds as 'Mesopotamia'. This designation dates back to antiquity, and those who use it want to show that the Kurds have been resident in this part of Türkiye since antiquity. It features in the names of various Kurdish TV and radio stations, cultural centres and arts organisations, and the same goes for the MA. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 26.

¹⁸² Bianet, *Mezopotamya Agency censored*, 13 March 2024.

¹⁸³ Bianet, *Nine Kurdish journalists detained in house raids*, 23 April 2024. Bianet, *Three Kurdish journalists referred to court after raids*, 26 April 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court arrests three jourmos over 'terror organization membership'*, 27 April 2024.

¹⁸⁴ In particular, this involved operations in parts of Syria that are inhabited predominantly by Kurds.

¹⁸⁵ Bianet, *Report documents over 200 cases of censorship against artistic freedom in 2023*, 26 March 2024.

Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025.

criminal charges and spoke of a violation of freedom of expression.¹⁸⁶ The status of this case was not clear at the time of writing.¹⁸⁷

Another case that stood out concerned the statement of an LGBTIQ+ activist named Iris Mozalar. On 30 June 2024, anti-Syrian riots broke out in Kayseri (see 10.7.3). On social media, Mozalar condemned the violence against the Syrian refugee community and called for tolerance. Police arrested her on 10 July 2024 for inciting public hatred and enmity and released her on 12 July 2024. The Istanbul LGBTIQ+ Pride Week Committee, which organises the annual Pride in Istanbul, condemned the detention of Mozalar. She traced the negative government attention to the fact that she is a trans woman of Kurdish and Alevi background (additional information on the situation of Alevis and transgender people is provided in 6.2 and 8.5, respectively). At the time of writing, her case was still in process.¹⁸⁸

3.5.2 *Effects of the Anti-Disinformation Law*

In the aftermath of the earthquakes in south-eastern Türkiye in February 2023, the Anti-Disinformation Law was frequently used against journalists and citizens who were critical of government action in the earthquake zone.¹⁸⁹ During the reporting period, authorities frequently deployed the Anti-Disinformation Law against critical journalists, activists and 'ordinary' citizens.¹⁹⁰ According to one source, at least thirty journalists were indicted under the aforementioned law between October 2022 and early November 2024.¹⁹¹

To illustrate, the following are several examples of journalists who were subjected to criminal investigation or prosecution under the Anti-Disinformation Law. These examples should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

On 1 November 2023, Tolga Şardan was detained on suspicion of spreading disinformation. In an article, this journalist had reported about possible corruption within the judiciary.¹⁹² He was released on parole on 6 November 2023. In the process, a travel ban was imposed on him (additional information on travels bans is provided in 3.6).¹⁹³ The criminal case against Şardan was ongoing at the time of writing.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁶ Bianet, *YouTuber faces legal action over sharia law comments*, 18 June 2024. Balkan Insight (BI), *Turkish-Albanian YouTuber wanted in Turkey denies insulting Islam*, 19 June 2024. Bianet, *Istanbul Bar slams investigation into YouTuber over 'Sharia' controversy*, 20 June 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish Justice Ministry issues arrest warrant for YouTube over Prophet Mohammed comment*, 20 June 2024. Deutsche Welle (DW), *Turkey: a democratic future or Sharia?*, 27 June 2024.

¹⁸⁷ Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025. Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 13 February 2025.

¹⁸⁸ Bianet, *LGBTIQ+ activist Iris Mozalar arrested over social media posts defending refugees*, published on 11 July 2024, updated on 12 July 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court arrests LGBTIQ+ activist over tweets condemning racist attacks on Syrians*, 11 July 2024. MLSA, *LGBTIQ+ activist Iris Mozalar arrested for condemning racist attacks*, 12 July 2024. Kaos GL, *LGBTIQ+ rights activist Iris Mozalar was released*, 16 July 2024. Bianet, *'They intended to intimidate the LGBTIQ+ movement through my arrest'*, 6 October 2024. Kaos GL, *Prosecutor demanded Iris Mozalar to be sentenced*, 12 February 2025.

¹⁸⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 27, 30 and 31. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025.

¹⁹¹ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

¹⁹² Duvar English, *Turkish court arrests journalist over reporting on judicial corruption*, 1 November 2023. Reuters, *Arrests of two prominent Turkish reporters stokes free-speech concerns*, 2 November 2023.

¹⁹³ HDN, *Journalist Şardan released*, 7 November 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 December 2024.

Around the same time, the public prosecutor's office launched a criminal investigation into three journalists from *BirGün*, a left-wing daily newspaper. They had made contributions to articles stating that a construction company had rigged the purchase of two parcels of land. The company, Pasifik Construction, was owned by Fatih Erdoğan.¹⁹⁵ His wife was an MP on behalf of the AKP. The journalists were suspected of spreading disinformation.¹⁹⁶ The outcome of the study was unknown at the time of writing.¹⁹⁷

On 20 September 2024, police raided the home of Rabia Önver, a journalist who had written a series of articles about a gang in the eastern city of Hakkâri that was engaged in prostitution and drug trafficking. According to Önver, this gang allegedly has links to Turkish military and village guards. The latter are Kurdish paramilitaries fighting alongside the Turkish army against the PKK. Önver was charged with spreading disinformation.¹⁹⁸

A criminal case against Evrim Kepenek was initiated on 23 September 2024. In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, this journalist had posted a critical report on X. In this post, she reported that the gendarmerie had confiscated tents that had not been provided by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). Kepenek stood trial for spreading disinformation.¹⁹⁹

On 22 November 2024, the public prosecutor's office began a criminal investigation into Fatih Altaylı and İsmail Saymaz. These two journalists had commented on the involvement of three former Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) MPs in gold smuggling.²⁰⁰ The MHP is in a political alliance with the AKP (see 1.1.4). Both journalists were suspected of spreading disinformation.²⁰¹

In December 2024, the journalist Evren Demirdaş was acquitted of spreading disinformation. He had written a critical article about a tender procedure awarded to a construction company known as Ziver Construction. The owner of that company, Veysel Demirci, maintained ties with the AKP.²⁰²

3.5.3 *Defamation of the President*

During President Erdoğan's terms in office (2014–present), an increasing number of individuals were investigated, prosecuted and convicted under Article 299 of the Turkish Penal Code²⁰³ for insulting the president. This development traced back to events including the 2018 shift from a parliamentary system to a presidential system. Within the parliamentary system, the president had served a largely ceremonial function. The president represented the unity of the Turkish state and people and, as such, was inviolable. An insult to the president was thus considered an affront to the unity and moral integrity of the state and the people. Article 299 of

¹⁹⁵ As far as is known, the owner of Pasifik Construction was not related to President Erdoğan.

¹⁹⁶ Bianet, 'Disinformation' investigation for three journalists from *BirGün*, 2 November 2023. Duvar English, *Investigation launched into daily BirGün over 'disinformation'*, 2 November 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 December 2024.

¹⁹⁸ Bianet, *Journalist faces disinformation charges after reporting on alleged 'state-linked' criminal gang*, 24 September 2024. Bianet, *Prosecutor declines to take Kurdish journalist's testimony despite home raid, arrest warrant*, 25 September 2024.

¹⁹⁹ Bianet, *Trial begins for Bianet editor Evrim Kepenek over social media post on 2023 earthquakes*, 23 September 2024. Duvar English, *Journalist on trial for 'disinformation' over tweet about Feb. 6 earthquake aid*, 24 September 2024.

²⁰⁰ The following three former MPs were involved: Hasan Basri Sönmez, İsmail Akgül and Mustafa Demir.

²⁰¹ Bianet, *Journalists face disinformation probe after gold smuggling allegations against MPs*, 22 November 2024. HDN, *Probe launched into journalists Altaylı, Saymaz*, 22 November 2024.

²⁰² Bianet, *Journalist investigated for reporting on public tender cleared of disinformation charges*, 10 December 2024.

²⁰³ In Turkish, *Türk Ceza Kanunu* (TCK).

the Penal Code was intended to protect the president, and thus the state and the people, from such insults. Since 2018, however, Erdoğan has ruled as an executive president within the presidential system. It is not always clear when he is acting as the leader of the ruling party and when he is acting as a representative of the state and the people. It is also not always possible to distinguish criticism of President Erdoğan as criticism of him as the party leader and criticism of him as a representative of the state and the people. This lack of clarity partly explains the sharp rise in the number of cases concerning Article 299 of the Penal Code.²⁰⁴

It was not possible to obtain a comprehensive overview of the exact number of charges and convictions related to Section 299 of the Penal Code. In its 2023 annual report, the Turkish Ministry of Justice reported statistics on Article 299 (insulting the president) in the same category as Article 300 (insulting the symbols of the Turkish state) and Article 301 (insulting the Turkish nation, the Turkish state or the organs and institutions of the state). Consequently, no statistics were available that concerned only Article 299.²⁰⁵

According to the Turkish Ministry of Justice, 18,866 individuals were subjected to criminal investigation under Articles 299 to 301 in 2023. Of this group, 1,602 had been convicted; 1,982 others received suspended sentences, meaning that they would not have to go to prison except in the case of recidivism.²⁰⁶ The statistics did not make it clear which penalties had been imposed.²⁰⁷

During the reporting period, several cases concerning insulting the president stood out. These cases are for illustrative purposes only, and they are not exhaustive.

On 12 August 2024, Dilruba Kayserilioğlu was arrested. During a street interview in Izmir, a western Turkish city on the Aegean Sea, she had said that: 'If you abolish the parliamentary system and hand over the Republic of Türkiye to one person, that person will treat it like his fathers' farm'. In the same interview, she described supporters of the blocking of Instagram as 'idiots' (see 3.5.4 for additional information on the temporary blocking of Instagram). In response, Kayserilioğlu was charged with insulting the president and inciting public hatred and enmity. She was released on parole on 29 August 2024. In the process, a travel ban was imposed on her. On 3 September 2024, an Izmir court in first instance sentenced her to a suspended jail term of 7.5 months. Kayserilioğlu was not found guilty of insulting the president and inciting public hatred and enmity, but she was found guilty of insulting part of the population. Kayserilioğlu herself claimed innocence, invoking the right to freedom of expression. She filed an appeal.²⁰⁸ Her appeal was still in process at the time of writing.²⁰⁹

Another illustrative example concerned the case of Tuncay Özkan, a CHP MP. On 25 August 2024, a criminal investigation was opened against him. President Erdoğan had described the opposition as being 'elitist' and 'boastful'. To this, Özkan claimed

²⁰⁴ Al-Monitor, *Erdogan may be the world's most 'insulted' leader*, 11 March 2020. T24, *İnsanoğlu gariptir, her lafi kaldırmaz!* ('People are unpredictable, they cannot tolerate every word'), 24 August 2024.

²⁰⁵ Confidential source, 3 September 2024.

²⁰⁶ Turkish Ministry of Justice, *Justice statistics, 2023*, March 2024, pp. 68 and 100.

²⁰⁷ Confidential source, 3 and 30 September 2024.

²⁰⁸ Duvar English, *Turkish court arrests woman for 'insulting President' in street interview*, 13 August 2024. Bianet, *Woman faces jail term after criticizing Erdoğan over Instagram ban*, 16 August 2024. Bianet, *Woman released after arrest for criticizing Erdoğan over Instagram ban*, 30 August 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court releases woman arrested for street interview*, 30 August 2024. HDN, *Woman released after arrest over street interview*, 30 August 2024. Türkiye Today, *Turkish court sentences woman to 7 months for street interview comments*, 3 September 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court sentences woman to 7.5 months in prison for 'insulting public' in street interview, postpones ruling*, 4 September 2024.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

that President Erdoğan was a 'snob' who lived in a palace and had thirteen planes at his disposal. President Erdoğan sued him for insulting the president and demanded a compensation for non-pecuniary damages in the amount of 250,000 Turkish liras.²¹⁰ At the time of writing, the investigation was ongoing, and no charges had yet been filed against Özkan.²¹¹

3.5.4 Increased threat to internet freedom

During the preceding reporting period, internet freedom was under pressure. The repression of internet freedom has continued during the current reporting period. *İfade Özgürlüğü Derneği* (Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD) is a Turkish NGO whose activities include mapping the scale of website-blocking by the Turkish government.²¹² According to İFÖD data, the number of blocked websites increased, as evidenced in the graph below.

This graph is based on İFÖD data and shows an increase in blocked websites in the period from December 2019 to December 2023. There were 408,494 blocked websites at the end of 2019.²¹³ Four years later, the number had risen to 953,415. At the end of the first quarter of 2024, this number had further increased to 1,043,312.²¹⁴

As noted in the previous COI Report, websites blocked by the Turkish authorities included the Turkish-language service of Voice of America (VOA) and the entire *Deutsche Welle* (DW) internet domain. This was because these two news platforms had refused to apply for a licence.²¹⁵ At the time of writing, both internet domains were still blocked. Although DW had lodged an appeal, it was declared unfounded. In response, the German news platform filed a petition in the Constitutional Court (AYM). As for VOA, several users filed an appeal. This appeal was declared unfounded, after which the case was taken to the ECtHR.²¹⁶

During the reporting period, Turkish authorities blocked access to several digital platforms. On 12 July 2024, Türkiye became the first country to block access to Wattpad, an online platform for writers and readers. Authorities gave no reason for the blockade.²¹⁷ Wattpad was still blocked at the time of writing.²¹⁸

²¹⁰ Duvar English, *President Erdoğan sues CHP MP for 250,000 liras in compensation over 'snob' remark*, 26 August 2024. Bianet, *Main opposition MP under investigation for calling Erdoğan a 'snob'*, 26 August 2024. HDN, *Probe launched against CHP deputy for insulting Erdoğan*, 26 August 2024. T24, *İnsanoğlu gariptir, her lafı kaldırmaz!*, 24 August 2024. According to CoinMill.com, an online exchange rate converter, on 20 September 2024, 250,000 Turkish liras had the same value as 10,594.23 euros.

²¹¹ Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 December 2024.

²¹² Additional information on the İFÖD is available at <https://ifade.org/tr/en/>.

²¹³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 25.

²¹⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 29.

²¹⁵ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

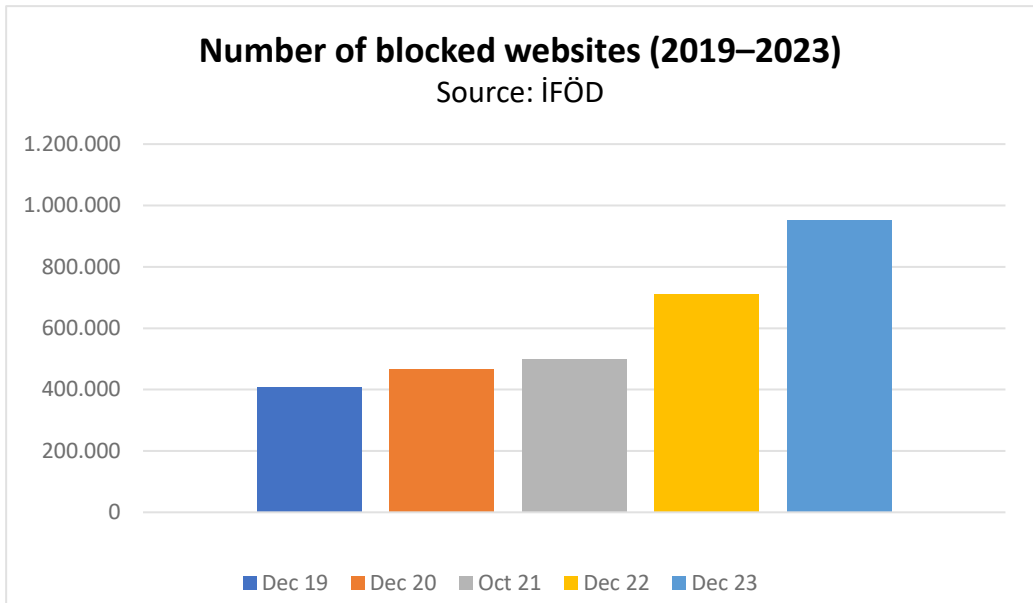
²¹⁶ Bianet, *Turkey blocks access to Voice of America's Turkish website*, 30 August 2023. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 29 and 30. Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

²¹⁷ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²¹⁸ Duvar English, *Yet again Turkey bans access to a website, this time to story-sharing platform Wattpad*, 17 July 2024. Bianet, *Turkey becomes first country to ban Wattpad*, 18 July 2024.

²¹⁹ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

On 2 August 2024, the *Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu* (Information and Communication Technologies Authority, BTK), blocked access to Instagram. According to the BTK, this social media platform contained content inciting gambling, alcohol abuse and the sexual abuse of children. In addition, Instagram displayed content insulting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye.²¹⁹ The blocking of Instagram drew fierce criticism, including from 61 provincial bar associations.²²⁰ On 10 August 2024, after more than a week, Turkish authorities lifted the block on Instagram.²²¹



A blockade of Roblox, a digital platform for gamers, followed on 7 August 2024. According to Turkish authorities, the platform contained context that invited child abuse.²²² One source noted that computer games featuring President Erdoğan might have been the real reason for the blockade. The platform was still blocked at the time of writing.²²³

On 9 October 2024, Turkish authorities blocked access to Discord. Content had appeared on this online platform celebrating the murder of two women in Istanbul (additional details are provided in 7.2). So-called 'incels' (a contraction of 'involuntary celibates')²²⁴ welcomed this violence against women. This constituted

²¹⁹ *Atatürk* means 'Father of the Turks'.

²²⁰ In Türkiye, bar associations are organised at the provincial level. These bar associations are united in a national professional association of lawyers known by the acronym 'TBB'.

²²¹ AP, *Turkey blocks access to Instagram, It's in response to removal of posts on Hamas chief, reports say*, 2 August 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey bans Instagram for 'criminal content'*, 2 August 2024. Bianet, *Sixty-one bar associations in Turkey demand lift of Instagram ban*, published on 7 August 2024, updated on 8 August 2024. Bianet, *Turkey restores access to Instagram after Hamas row*, published on 12 August 2024, updated on 14 August 2024. NOS, *Turkiye heft blokkade Instagram na ruim een week op*, 12 August 2024. The Independent, *Turkey suddenly reinstates access to Instagram after more than a week*, 12 August 2024.

²²² BI, *Turkey blocks access to popular online game platform Roblox*, 8 August 2024. Bloomberg, *Turkey blocks Roblox over child abuse risk, Minister says*, 8 August 2024. Reuters, *Turkey blocks Roblox access over abuse concerns, justice minister says*, 8 August 2024.

²²³ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²²⁴ On the internet, incels form a subculture of heterosexual men who have never had sex or have not had sex for a long time and blame women for it. They vent their hatred of women in closed chat groups.

the Turkish government's immediate reason for blocking access to Discord.²²⁵ The platform was still blocked at the time of writing.²²⁶

In addition to the increase in the number of blocked websites during the reporting period, there was an increase in the number of government agencies that were given authority to order the blocking of websites. As of late June 2023, more than 25 agencies had used the mandate to have websites blocked.²²⁷ By November 2024, this number had risen to nearly thirty. Amongst other entities, the Turkish Ministries of Culture and Tourism and of Health were granted the aforementioned authority during the reporting period. As in preceding reporting periods, the BTK remained the government agency that blocked the most internet domains.²²⁸

3.5.5 *Government monitoring of social media and mobile phone traffic*

Turkish police monitored social media on a large scale. To this end, it had a dedicated cyber department at its disposal, known as *Siberay*. This section was not limited to the social media accounts of well-known journalists and activists, but also included those of 'ordinary' social media users.²²⁹

The police cyber department was able to compile criminal records consisting of screenshots of tweets and other utterances on social media at short notice. Drawing on data published by the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, the İFÖD managed to create an overview of the extent of social media monitoring. In 2023, the police screened 172,795 social media accounts. In the same year, 72,727 social media accounts were the subject of criminal investigations.²³⁰ In many cases, the content of a post had prompted the screening of someone's account, with previous posts also being scrutinised, according to one source.²³¹

The graphs below show the extent of government monitoring of social media accounts over the period from 2018 to 2023. The graphs are based on the data collected by the İFÖD.²³² It was unclear how many criminal investigations had resulted in criminal prosecution and conviction.²³³

Turkish authorities were unable to intercept 'content data': the content of text messages, email and WhatsApp messages. They were able to retrieve 'traffic data'. Information contained in such data included the start and end times of mobile phone calls, as well as their duration.²³⁴

²²⁵ BI, *Turkey blocks access to Discord online platform citing child safety concerns*, 9 October 2024. Bloomberg, *Turkey bans Discord platform after outrage over murder comments*, 9 October 2024. NU.nl, *Rusland en Türkiye blokkeren chatdienst Discord*, 9 October 2024. Reuters, *Turkey blocks instant messaging platform Discord*, 9 October 2024.

²²⁶ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²²⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 29.

²²⁸ Confidential source, 4 November 2024. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²²⁹ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025. Additional information on *Siberay* is available at <https://en.siberay.com>.

²³⁰ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²³¹ Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 13 February 2025.

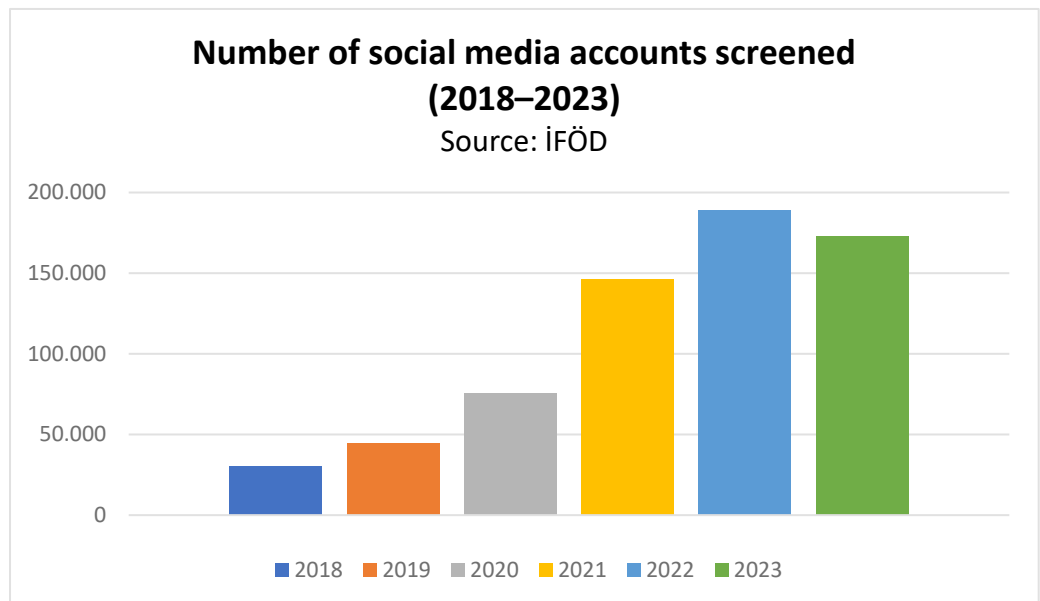
²³² Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²³³ Email correspondence with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 16 December 2024.

²³⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 33. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

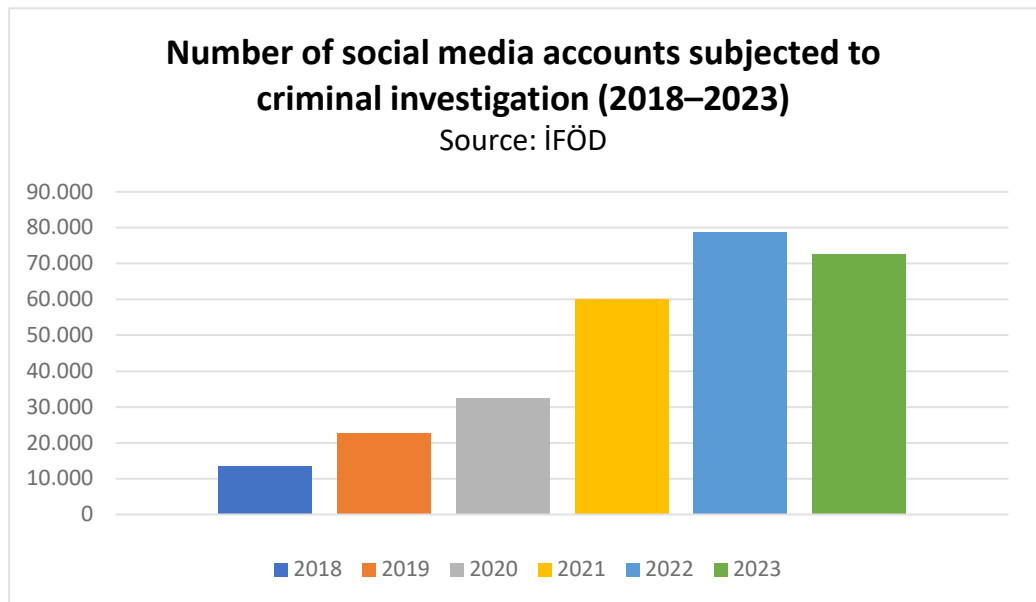
Social media users were not always sure of where the Turkish government drew the line. This was due to the broad, vague phrasing of the laws and regulations governing terror propaganda and disinformation. Prosecutors thus had a wide range of legal grounds at their disposal to open criminal investigations or trials. If a message concerned an issue that was in the spotlight, the authorities were quick to proceed with a criminal investigation. According to one source, if ‘ordinary’ citizens reported on subjects that had received little attention, a criminal investigation could sometimes take several years.²³⁵

Another source indicated that social media users did not always know whether a post was permissible, as the Turkish authorities did not have clear guidelines, and they enforced them arbitrarily. This led to a culture of fear and self-censorship amongst social media users, the same source stated. Some users resorted to using anonymous accounts or code language, and others withdrew from the public debate altogether.²³⁶



²³⁵ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024.

²³⁶ Email correspondence with Gürkan Öztüran (Monitoring Officer for the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, ECPMF), 13 February 2025.



3.6 Travel bans

The Turkish Criminal Procedure Code²³⁷ establishes that a prosecutor can apply to the court to impose a travel ban on a suspect, as well as the circumstances under which a travel ban can be imposed (Articles 109–112).²³⁸

Ultimately, a judge decides at the request of a prosecutor whether the accused should receive a travel ban. During the reporting period, such considerations still depended on the individual circumstances of a case. Nevertheless, sources confirmed in most of the cases with a political dimension – which were considered ‘terror cases’ within the context of Turkish criminal law – a travel ban was imposed.²³⁹

One source added that, in cases with a political dimension, particular attention should be directed towards Kurdish activists and Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists). The source described the frequency of travel bans in cases with a political dimension as ‘widespread’ and ‘systematic’. The source noted that travel bans were not automatically imposed in all cases. This source was aware of low-profile political activists who had not received a travel ban and who had legally travelled out of Türkiye.²⁴⁰

One other source observed that a travel ban was a popular tool not only for political reasons, but also because it proved to be an effective enforcement tool. When an obligation to report was imposed on a suspect, it put a strain on the capacity of the police station where the person concerned was required to report with some regularity. With a travel ban, Turkish authorities ensured that a suspect could not

²³⁷ In Turkish, *Ceza Muhakemesi Kanunu* (CMK).

²³⁸ An English translation of the Turkish Criminal Procedure Code can be consulted on the website of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Feridun Yenisey, *Turkish Criminal Procedure Code, Ceza Muhakemesi Kanunu*, published in 2009, pp. 112–116.

²³⁹ Confidential source, 29 November 2024. Confidential source, 2 December 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

²⁴⁰ Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

leave the country legally, without further effort on the part of the government, the source noted.²⁴¹

3.7 Arrests, custody and detentions

3.7.1 Introduction

This section elaborates on the practice of arrests and the conditions under which people were detained (see 3.7.2). Prison conditions are addressed as well (see 3.7.3), with particular attention to prison overcrowding, levels of access to medical care and opportunities for release (on medical grounds). This section focuses purely on detainees and prison inmates who were apprehended or incarcerated due to their political beliefs and/or activism.

In the Turkish context, the term ‘detention centre’ is used to describe a short-term holding facility for detainees, such as a police station. In contrast, a ‘prison’ is a facility where convicted individuals serve their term of imprisonment or where detainees are held in pre-trial detention for extended periods of time.²⁴²

3.7.2 Arrests and detentions

As noted in preceding official reports, procedural safeguards regarding detention of arrestees were not always respected. For example, some detainees reported instances of mistreatment and of police officers or gendarmes who remained in the room as medical examinations were being conducted in detention centres. Furthermore, no actual examination took place during such health checks.²⁴³

This situation remained the same during the current reporting period.²⁴⁴ In this regard, one source observed that political dissidents and critics in custody were insulted and threatened. In some cases, detainees were also beaten. There were also instances in which arrestees were pressured to act as informants (further details on this practice are provided in 5.4.4). In exchange for cooperation, individuals were promised release or reduced sentences. The same source shared that it was not possible to capture the total extent of assault of arrestees, as not every victim of this practice reported it.²⁴⁵

Another source cited an incident that took place on 4 April 2024 in Istanbul. On that day, police arrested at least 35 women. These women had demonstrated against the decision to annul the election victory of Zeydan, the DEM mayoral candidate in Van (see 1.1.3). The women were handcuffed with their hands behind their backs and taken away in police vans. They were assaulted on their way to and at the police station. Police released the women the next day. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether they would be criminally prosecuted.²⁴⁶

As stated in the preceding COI Report, there were ‘pre-arranged’ days on which Turkish police arrested protesters and temporarily detained them. Examples in this regard could include International Women’s Day on 8 March (see 7.4), the Kurdish new year around 21 March, Labour Day on 1 May, Pride Month in June (see 8.2) and

²⁴¹ Confidential source, 2 December 2024.

²⁴² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 37. Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

²⁴³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 38.

²⁴⁴ CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 3.

²⁴⁵ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

²⁴⁶ Confidential source, 6 and 12 September 2024.

the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November (see 7.4).²⁴⁷

This practice continued during the reporting period. For example, thousands of people celebrated *Newroz* (the Kurdish New Year) in Istanbul on 17 March 2024.²⁴⁸ This festival is traditionally a celebration of spring, but it has taken on a highly politicised character in Türkiye. Many Turkish Kurds see *Newroz* as an opportunity to express their Kurdish consciousness and to push for political and cultural rights.²⁴⁹ Police repelled Kurdish flags during the celebrations and detained 75 to 100 people. They had allegedly used their slogans and banners as propaganda for the PKK, in addition to disrupting public order.²⁵⁰ Additional information on the situation of Kurds in Türkiye is presented in Chapter 5.

On 1 May 2024, Labour Day demonstrators attempted to reach Istanbul's Taksim Square. Riot police dispersed protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas. They arrested more than two hundred people in the process.²⁵¹

3.7.3 *Prison conditions*

Preceding COI Reports commented on overcrowding in Turkish prisons.²⁵² During the reporting period, prisons in Türkiye remained overcrowded.²⁵³ In November 2024, there were 371,000 inmates in the Turkish prison system, which had capacity for only 299,000. There was thus a 'surplus' of 72,000 prisoners. According to one source, this overcrowding led to health problems, including the spread of diseases, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, skin conditions and COVID-19.²⁵⁴ The graph below, based largely on data from the Turkish government, shows how overcrowding in Turkish prisons increased over the period 2020–2024.

It was not possible to ascertain the exact number of political prisoners, as the Turkish authorities did not distinguish between imprisoned terrorists and activists in their statistics. In this COI Report, the term 'political prisoners' refers to people imprisoned not because of criminal acts but for political reasons. According to one source, there were between 20,000 and 25,000 political prisoners in April 2024.²⁵⁵

Most sources independently indicated that the bulk of political prisoners were Kurds. Two sources stated a percentage of around eighty percent in this regard. These were estimates, as no statistics were available on the ethnicity of political prisoners. The remainder included Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists), individuals who had been involved in the 2013 anti-government protests, human rights defenders, critical journalists and left-wing activists.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 38 and 39.

²⁴⁸ *Newroz* literally means 'new day' and is known in Turkish as *Nevruz*.

²⁴⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 51 and 52.

²⁵⁰ Duvar English, *At least 100 detained in Newroz celebrations in Istanbul*, 17 March 2024. Daily Sabah, *Turkish police detain 75 for terrorist propaganda at Nevruz event*, 18 March 2024. HDN, *75 detained at Nevruz event in Istanbul*, 19 March 2024.

²⁵¹ Al Jazeera, *Turkey police arrest 210 at Istanbul May Day protests*, 1 May 2024. Bianet, *Over 200 detained during Istanbul May Day events*, 1 May 2024.

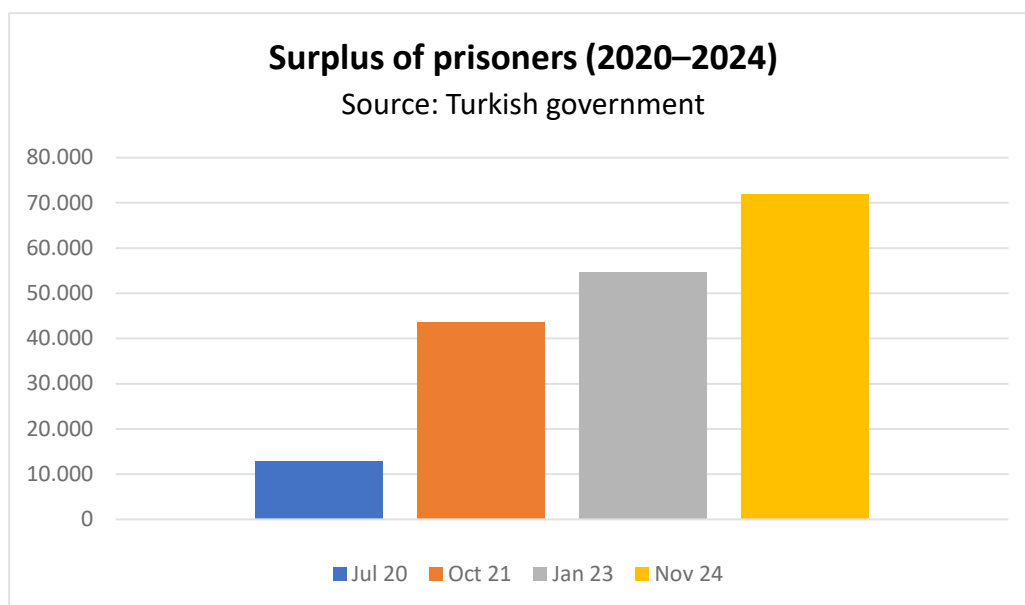
²⁵² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 39.

²⁵³ CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ Confidential source, 19 November 2024. Confidential source, 11 December 2024.

²⁵⁵ Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

²⁵⁶ Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.



As indicated in the preceding COI Report, access to healthcare for detainees was limited.²⁵⁷ This situation remained the same during the current reporting period.²⁵⁸ For example, sick prisoners were not transported to hospital in ambulances, but in small vehicles devoid of ventilation. Several sick people were picked up throughout the day, meaning that a person could spend the entire day in such a vehicle, with no possibility of using a toilet. Furthermore, prisoners remained handcuffed during medical examinations in hospitals. Guards also violated the privacy of sick prisoners by telling medics the offences for which they had been detained. In some cases, a prisoner's health complaints were such that they required the care of a specialist. In such cases, treatment was nevertheless provided by a generalist.²⁵⁹

In June 2023, there were about 1,600 seriously ill prisoners. These cases involved conditions including cancer, heart disease and dementia.²⁶⁰ According to one source, this number had risen to almost two thousand during the reporting period. This was based on the number known to the source. The actual number of seriously ill prisoners was probably higher, the source stated.²⁶¹

The *Adli Tıp Kurumu* (Council of Forensic Medicine, ATK) is authorised to prepare a report allowing prisoners to be released early on medical grounds. As in the preceding reporting period,²⁶² there were concerns about the independence of the ATK.²⁶³

During the reporting period, the following events concerning seriously ill prisoners stood out. These examples are used solely for illustrative purposes. This should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

²⁵⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 39 and 40.

²⁵⁸ CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 4.

²⁵⁹ Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

²⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 40.

²⁶¹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

²⁶² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 40.

²⁶³ Duvar English, *Association report details rights violations in central Turkey's prisons*, 13 July 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

Makbule Özer was an 82-year-old inmate who struggled with several health problems, including asthma, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension²⁶⁴ and shortness of breath. Özer wanted her prison sentence to be commuted to house arrest so that she could be cared for by her friends and relatives. The Turkish Human Rights Association (İHD) demonstrated for her release on medical grounds. The ATK decided that Özer could serve her sentence in the prison in Van.²⁶⁵

Hanife Arslan was another 82-year-old prisoner with serious health issues. This Kurdish woman suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), stomach ulcers, diabetes, heart failure and hypertension, amongst other conditions. The İHD and DEM called for her release. Initially, however, the ATK ruled that Arslan could remain in prison. The authorities released her on 25 January 2025.²⁶⁶

The İHD also expressed concern for the welfare of Fatma Tokmak, a prisoner in Istanbul. She suffered from severe heart problems and had to undergo blood transfusions every week. The ATK saw no reason to release Tokmak on medical grounds.²⁶⁷

On 2 October 2024, Abdulkadir Kuday died in prison in Istanbul. He was paralysed and suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). An Istanbul hospital had earlier determined that Kuday could no longer remain in prison, given his health condition. The ATK nevertheless ruled that he was fit enough to stay in jail.²⁶⁸

Delayed release of political prisoners

As noted in the preceding COI Report, prison authorities prevented the release of political prisoners in some cases.²⁶⁹ This situation persisted during the reporting period. The Turkish Administration and Observations Boards (in Turkish, *İdare ve Gözlem Kurulları*) constitute the prison authority that decides whether a prisoner can actually be released. This body seized on seemingly arbitrary grounds to prevent the release of some individuals. For example, some releases were denied for not reading literature in the prison library, not participating in group activities, not visiting the prison imam or not expressing remorse. The book collection in the prison library contained no literature with opposition views. Faith leaders from other religions could not provide spiritual assistance in prison.²⁷⁰

The Administration and Observations Boards mentioned above fall under the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses.²⁷¹ This general directorate falls under the Ministry of Justice. Prisoners could not challenge a decision of the Administration and Observations Boards within the prison system. They had to take the case to a court.²⁷²

²⁶⁴ Also known as high blood pressure.

²⁶⁵ Bianet, *82-year-old ill prisoner denied house arrest*, 29 April 2024.

²⁶⁶ JINHA, *Health of Hanife Arslan deteriorating*, 5 August 2024. Bianet, *82-year-old ill prisoner released under supervision*, 27 January 2025.

²⁶⁷ Bianet, *Severely ill prisoner Fatma Tokmak held in solitary confinement*, 8 October 2024.

²⁶⁸ Bianet, *Ill prisoner Abdulkadir Kuday dies in prison*, 2 October 2024.

²⁶⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 41.

²⁷⁰ Duvar English, *Association report details rights violations in central Turkey's prisons*, 13 July 2024. CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 4. Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024. Confidential source, 10 December 2024.

²⁷¹ In Turkish, *Ceza ve Tevkifevleri Genel Müdürlüğü*.

²⁷² Confidential source, 18 February 2025.

On 23 November 2023, two associations issued a report showing that release had been deferred for 28 prisoners.²⁷³ These prisoners were dispersed across thirteen prisons. The prison authorities argued several grounds for deferred release. For example, the prisoners in question had allegedly not expressed remorse or distanced themselves from the ideology of the PKK and its leader, Öcalan.²⁷⁴

The following examples of deferred releases stood out during the reporting period, but can by no means be considered exhaustive.

Resul Baltacı had been in prison since 1992 for links to the PKK. His release was scheduled for 2023, but it was postponed time and again. When he had written to his cellmate's relatives to inform them that the latter no longer had any money in his bank account, prison authorities took that as evidence of having an 'organisational connection' to the PKK. Baltacı reportedly struggled with serious health issues.²⁷⁵

In December 2023, it became clear that the release of the ailing prisoner İsmail Hakkı Tursun had again been deferred because he had participated in a prison protest against Öcalan's solitary confinement and Türkiye's military interventions in northern Syria. The 59-year-old Tursun struggled with serious health issues, including shortness of breath and hernia.²⁷⁶

Ali Koç, who had been imprisoned since 1992, was scheduled for release on 15 December 2022. On 9 February 2024, however, he had still not been released by the prison administration. According to prison authorities, Koç had allegedly not expressed remorse.²⁷⁷

On 26 November 2024, the Kurdish poet İlhan Sami Çomak was released after being in prison for thirty years. His release had also been deferred earlier, due to lack of good behaviour. According to prison authorities, he had allegedly not expressed remorse.²⁷⁸

One source was aware of a political prisoner whose release had been deferred because he had not visited a prison imam. The prisoner was of Alevi background, and prison imams adhere to Sunni Islam. Consequently, the prisoner had no need to meet with an imam.²⁷⁹ Additional information on Alevis is provided in 6.2.

Kurdish Hezbollah

The Kurdish Hezbollah, not to be confused with the Shiite Hezbollah movement from Lebanon, was engaged in an armed conflict with the PKK in the 1990s. Kurdish Hezbollah supporters combined a Kurdish consciousness with a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam. The group eventually renounced the use of violence. The Kurdish Hezbollah gave rise to *Hür Dava Partisi* (Free Cause Party, HÜDA PAR), a legally operating Islamist party.²⁸⁰ No specific information was available on the situation of

²⁷³ One of the associations was *Özgürlük için Hukukçular Derneği* (Lawyers Association for Freedom, ÖHD). The ÖHD is known as a pro-Kurdish and socialist lawyers' association. In Kurdish, the ÖHD is known as *Komeleya Hiqûqnasên Ji Bo Azadiyê*. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 34.

²⁷⁴ Bianet, *Release of 28 prisoners from 13 prisons delayed*, 24 November 2023.

²⁷⁵ Bianet, *Imprisoned for 31 years and 1 month; release blocked for the past 13 months*, 21 November 2024.

²⁷⁶ Bianet, *Ill prisoner İsmail Hakkı Tursun's release delayed for third time*, 20 December 2023.

²⁷⁷ Duvar English, *Turkish prison postpones release of convict of 31 years for 'lack of remorse'*, 9 February 2024.

²⁷⁸ Bianet, *Kurdish poet İlhan Sami Çomak released from prison after 30 years*, 27 November 2024.

²⁷⁹ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

²⁸⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, October 2019, pp. 12 and 13. Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, p. 156.

detained members of the Kurdish Hezbollah or any amnesty arrangements that might be in place for this group.²⁸¹

3.8 Ill-treatment, torture and legal protection

As revealed in the preceding COI Report, ill-treatment and torture occurred in detention centres, prisons and outside on the streets, especially during demonstrations and rallies.²⁸²

The situation described above remained unchanged during the reporting period. This was highlighted in part by a report published by the TİHV in June 2024. By 2023, this human rights foundation had received 731 reports of ill-treatment and torture. The reports came from Ankara, Cizre, Diyarbakır, Istanbul, Izmir and Van. In 598 cases, the incident had taken place in custody; in 133 cases, the ill-treatment or torture had taken place in public spaces (for example, during a demonstration or press meeting). The victims included 428 men, 240 women and 63 non-binary people. Many incidents reported to the TİHV took place in June and July 2023 during Pride month.²⁸³ The report further noted that 62.2% of the victims were of Kurdish background.²⁸⁴

In the first eleven months of 2024, the İHD and TİHV received 692 reports of ill-treatment and torture.²⁸⁵

As stated in the preceding COI Report, although formal opportunities existed for victims of ill-treatment and torture to complain, these opportunities were not functioning optimally.²⁸⁶

This situation persisted during the current reporting period. As clearly noted in 3.2, there were concerns about the independence of the judiciary. There were also concerns about the independence of the *Türkiye İnsan Hakları ve Eşitlik Kurumu* (Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye, TİHEK). This government body takes reports from citizens, which have a bearing on human rights.²⁸⁷ The chair and members of the board had been appointed by President Erdoğan.²⁸⁸ Sources indicated that the TİHEK did not accept reports on religious and sexual minorities (information on the situation of religious and sexual minorities is presented in Chapters 6 and 8, respectively). The institute would rather focus on reports concerning individuals with disabilities or Muslims with a pious lifestyle.²⁸⁹

²⁸¹ Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

²⁸² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 41.

²⁸³ Additional information on government repression during Pride month in 2023 is presented in: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 72 and 73.

²⁸⁴ Bianet, *Human rights report shows increasing torture against Kurds, LGBTI+s*, 17 June 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish Rights Foundation receives 731 reports of torture in 2023*, 18 June 2024.

²⁸⁵ Artı Gerçek, *2024 yılında hak ihlali bilançosu... Hem içerde, hem dışarda ('2024 Overview of human rights violations in 2024, both in prisons and on the streets')*, 10 December 2024. Agos, *A worrying year for rights*, 9 February 2025.

²⁸⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 42.

²⁸⁷ Additional information on the TİHEK is available at <https://www.tihkek.gov.tr/en/>.

²⁸⁸ CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 3. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024.

²⁸⁹ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, p. 14. Kaos GL, *2023 report, Fact sheet*, 23 February 2024, pp. 3, 7 and 11. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024. Kaos GL, *DEM Party MP Özgül Saki: 'TİHEK consistently gives "inadmissibility" decisions in the applications of LGBTI+s'*, 29 November 2024.

For example, one source cited an example of a Muslim woman who was refused entry to a swimming pool because she wanted to swim in a *haşema*, or Islamic swimming robe that covers female body shapes.²⁹⁰ The source noted that the TİHEK had stood up for the interests of this woman.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ In English, 'burkini'.

²⁹¹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

4 Gülenists

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the position of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists). These are the followers of the recently deceased Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic preacher who settled in Pennsylvania (USA) in 1999. Gülenists themselves use the term *Hizmet* ('servitude') to refer to their movement, thereby highlighting the altruistic dimension the organisation seeks to exude. The Gülen movement does not constitute a tightly defined organisation. People cannot become official members, and they do not have to undergo an initiation ritual. Before it was banned in Türkiye, the movement formed a loose collection of religious, educational and social institutions.²⁹²

The movement's diffuse organisational form makes it difficult to determine its exact size. Around 2010, it was estimated that between eight and ten million people in Türkiye were involved in some way with the Gülen movement.²⁹³ Professor Caroline Tee²⁹⁴ estimates that the number of faithful followers before 2016 was between a half million and two million.²⁹⁵

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen movement maintained an unofficial alliance with each other. Gradually, however, tensions arose between them and, in 2013, an open split occurred. The conflict reached a climax when a failed coup occurred on 15 July 2016, killing at least 241 people. Turkish authorities held Gülen and his movement responsible. Gülen condemned the coup attempt and denied any involvement. Following the failed coup, a state of emergency (SoE) was in place in Türkiye from 21 July 2016 to 19 July 2018.²⁹⁶

During this period, the Gülen movement in Türkiye was dismantled, and Gülenists in Türkiye were forced into an underground existence. Since 2016, the Gülen movement as an organised community lives on only in the diaspora. The Turkish government considers the Gülen movement a terrorist organisation and refers to it by the term *Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü* (Fethullah terror organisation, FETÖ).²⁹⁷

Addressed by his followers as *Hodjaefendi* ('respected teacher'), Gülen died in exile in Pennsylvania on 20 October 2024 at the age of 83. He had been struggling with health issues for quite some time.²⁹⁸

²⁹² Muhammad Afzal Upal and Carole M. Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, pp. 93 and 97. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 43 and 44. Home Office, *Country policy and information note, Turkey, Gülenists*, October 2023, pp. 4, 8, 11, 12 and 14. Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey, Individuals associated with the Gülen movement, The Finnish Immigration Service's fact-finding mission to Ankara and Istanbul 2–6 October 2023*, June 2024, p. 5. Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, p. 157.

²⁹³ David Tittensor, *The House of Service, The Gülen movement and Islam's third way*, published in 2014, p. 73.

²⁹⁴ Tee is a specialist in the Gülen movement and is affiliated with the British University of Chester.

²⁹⁵ Upal and Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, p. 97.

²⁹⁶ In Turkish, *Olağanüstü Hal* (OHAL).

²⁹⁷ Upal and Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, pp. 86–88 and 100–104. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 43. Home Office, *Turkey, Gülenists*, October 2023, pp. 4 and 14–16. Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, p. 157.

²⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, *US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen, accused of Turkey coup attempt, dies at 83*, 21 October 2024. Al-Monitor, *Erdogan's rival Fetullah Gulen dies in exile aged 83*, 21 October 2024. AA, *Türkiye confirms death of FETO terror group's ringleader Fetullah Gulen*, 21 October 2024. BBC, *Turkish cleric accused of planning failed 2016 coup dies*, 21 October 2024. FT, *Cleric and alleged Turkish coup plotter Fethullah Gulen dies in exile*, 21 October 2024. NOS, *Turkse media: geestelijke Gülen (83), aartsvijand van Erdogan, overleden*, 21 October 2024. POLITICO, *Erdogan's arch enemy Fethullah Gulen dies*, 21 October 2024. The New York Times, *Fethullah Gulen, Turkish cleric*

Turkish authorities immediately made it clear that their fight against the Gülen movement would continue unabated. On 21 October 2024, the Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan announced that the Turkish government would not slacken its efforts to fight the Gülen movement.²⁹⁹ On the same day, Türkiye's defence ministry called on Gülen followers to surrender to the Turkish government.³⁰⁰ In early November 2024, President Erdoğan attended a summit meeting of the Organisation of Turkish States (OTS)³⁰¹ in the Kyrgyz capital of Bishkek. There he said, 'Our fight against all forms of terrorism, especially against FETÖ, will continue uninterrupted'.³⁰²

4.2 Extent of persecution

As stated in the preceding COI Report, the persecution of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) had decreased in intensity compared to the period immediately following the failed coup in July 2016. Turkish authorities still arrested (alleged) Gülenists, but not on the same scale as in the period immediately after the coup.³⁰³

This situation persisted during the reporting period. In October 2023, the UK Home Office concluded that most arrests and detentions had taken place during the state of emergency (July 2016–July 2018).³⁰⁴ The EU delegation in Türkiye concluded around the same period that the numbers of criminal investigations and prosecutions of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) were relatively low compared to the pre-2020 situation, as were the numbers of forced dismissals. The EU delegation traced this decline to the fact that the most visible Gülenists in Turkish society had already been dismissed or subjected to criminal investigation and prosecution.³⁰⁵

The decline in arrests and detentions was also reflected in figures made available by Turkish authorities. For example, 22,340 Gülenists were in pre-trial detention or prison in November 2021. By July 2022, this number had fallen to 19,252.³⁰⁶ According to Tunç, the Turkish Minister of Justice, this number had decreased further to 13,251 by 12 July 2024.³⁰⁷ This trend is visible in the graph below, based on Turkish government data.

and Erdogan rival, dies at 83, 21 October 2024. HDN, *Türkiye confirms death of FETÖ leader Gülen*, 22 October 2024.

²⁹⁹ AA, *Türkiye confirms death of FETO terror group's ringleader Fetullah Gulen*, published on 21 October 2024, updated on 22 October 2024. Daily Sabah, *Turkish officials vow fight against FETÖ will continue*, 21 October 2024. BBC, *Fethullah Gülen'in ölümü sonrası yapılanmayı neler bekliyor, kim yönetecek? ('What awaits the organisation after Fethullah Gülen's death, Who will take charge?')*, 19 November 2024.

³⁰⁰ Duvar English, *Turkish Defense Ministry calls Gülenists to 'surrender' after leader's death*, 22 October 2024.

³⁰¹ In Turkish, *Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı* (TDT). This intergovernmental organisation promotes cooperation between the countries where Turkic languages are spoken: namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Türkiye. Additional information on the OTS is available at <https://www.turkicstates.org/en>.

³⁰² Daily Sabah, *Erdoğan calls for Turkic unity for fair resolution of Palestinian issue*, 5 November 2024.

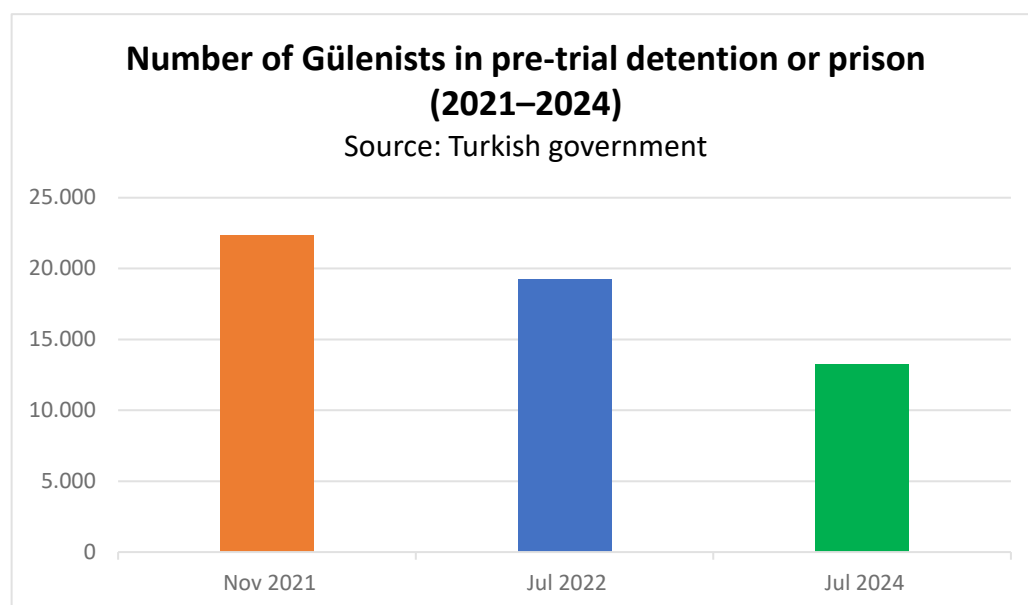
³⁰³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 43 and 44.

³⁰⁴ Home Office, *Turkey, Gülenists*, October 2023, pp. 8 and 19.

³⁰⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 7.

³⁰⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 44.

³⁰⁷ Turkish Ministry of Justice, *Adalet Bakanı Yılmaz Tunç, 15 Temmuz'u değerlendirdi ('The 15 July coup, A review by Minister of Justice Yılmaz Tunç')*, 12 July 2024.



The above decline was due to the fact that more and more Gülenists had served their prison sentences. Article 314 of the Turkish Penal Code stipulates a prison term of five to ten years for membership of a terrorist organisation. Most convicted Gülenists received prison sentences of 7.5 years. Article 62 of the Penal Code prescribes that the term of a prison sentence may be reduced by one sixth for good behaviour. Consequently, many Gülenists detained after the failed 2016 coup were released after six years and three months.³⁰⁸

The number of arrested Gülenists also decreased during the reporting period. Turkish authorities arrested 22,458 Gülenists in 2021.³⁰⁹ On 30 January 2024, Turkish Interior Minister Yerlikaya announced that 9,639 Gülen suspects had been detained and 1,689 Gülenists were imprisoned in 2023.³¹⁰ At the time of writing, Yerlikaya had not disclosed how many Gülenists had been arrested or imprisoned in 2024.³¹¹

The trend outlined above was despite to the fact that the Turkish authorities continued to persecute Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) during the reporting period.³¹² The following examples of arrests appeared in the media and are presented for illustrative purposes only. These cases can by no means be considered exhaustive.

On 24 October 2023, Yerlikaya announced that 611 Gülen suspects had been arrested in a nationwide operation. Arrests took place in 77 provinces. In doing so, the security apparatus had targeted ByLock users and individuals named in ByLock messages, amongst others.³¹³ ByLock was an application that Turkish authorities said Gülenists allegedly used to send encrypted messages to each other. For a long

³⁰⁸ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 11. Confidential source, 30 September and 4 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³⁰⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 44.

³¹⁰ District governorship of Oğuzeli (a district in the province of Gaziantep), *İçişleri Bakanımız Sayın Ali Yerlikaya, '1 Ocak 2023-31 Aralık 2023 tarihleri arasında bölücü terör örgütüne yönelik 3 Bin 911 şehir, 19 Bin 682 kırsal operasyon düzenlendi' dedi* ('Minister of the Interior, Mr Ali Yerlikaya, stated, "Between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023, 3,911 urban and 19,682 rural actions were carried out against the separatist terrorist organisation"), 30 January 2024.

³¹¹ Confidential source, 14 February 2025.

³¹² Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 6 and 7.

³¹³ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye captures over 600 suspects in nationwide anti-FETÖ op.*, 24 October 2023.

time, Turkish authorities used ByLock as an indication of involvement with the Gülen movement,³¹⁴ further details about which are presented in 4.3. ByLock is no longer available as an application.

On 7 February 2024, Turkish authorities arrested nineteen Gülen suspects in Ankara and Izmir. These suspects were cadets and current or former army officers. Some suspects had allegedly used the ByLock app.³¹⁵

On 21 February 2024, Yerlikaya proclaimed that 67 Gülen suspects had been arrested in fourteen provinces, including Ankara, Antalya, Elazığ, Istanbul, Manisa and Şanlıurfa.³¹⁶

On 14 May 2024, Yerlikaya announced that 544 Gülen suspects had been arrested. The wave of arrests had taken place in 62 provinces. In this case as well, some suspects had been arrested for allegedly using the ByLock application.³¹⁷

On 1 August 2024, Yerlikaya indicated that 55 Gülen suspects had been arrested in 21 cities, including in Ankara, Edirne, Elazığ, Isparta, Istanbul and Mersin. The suspects, who served in the army and police, allegedly maintained contact with each other from pay phones, amongst other charges. According to Turkish authorities, this was a common mode of communication within the Gülen movement, in addition to ByLock.³¹⁸

On 19 November 2024, Yerlikaya informed that 459 Gülen suspects had been arrested in 66 provinces. They served in sectors including the military, police and judiciary. The suspects maintained contact with each other through ByLock and pay phones.³¹⁹

On 14 January 2025, Yerlikaya announced that, in the previous week, 110 Gülen suspects had been arrested in 23 provinces, including Ankara and Istanbul.³²⁰ On 24 January 2025, the same minister announced that 71 Gülen suspects had been arrested, again in 23 provinces.³²¹

In the preceding reporting period, no follow-up reports on the fate of arrested Gülen suspects appeared in the media.³²² In addition, there were no follow-up reports during the reporting period, leaving it unclear whether the detainees had been released, criminally prosecuted or convicted.³²³

The continuation of arrests of Gülen suspects was evident from media reports, as well as from data on the website of the Turkish Ministry of the Interior. It revealed that 27 operations had taken place between 10 January and 23 October 2024, during which a total of 1,824 people had been detained. In most cases, the suspects were said to have used the ByLock app or pay phones.³²⁴

³¹⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 45.

³¹⁵ Daily Sabah, *19 nabbed, 5 wanted in operations against FETÖ in Türkiye*, 7 February 2024.

³¹⁶ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye captures 67 FETÖ suspects in nationwide raid*, 21 February 2024.

³¹⁷ Die Zeit, *Türkischer Innenminister verkündet Festnahme Hunderter Gülen-Anhänger*, 14 May 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish authorities detain 544 for Gülen network membership charge*, 14 May 2024. HDN, *Over 500 suspects nabbed over FETÖ ties*, 14 May 2024.

³¹⁸ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye detains 55 suspected FETÖ infiltrators in 21 cities*, 1 August 2024.

³¹⁹ Daily Sabah, *'Operation Clamp' nets 459 FETÖ suspects across Türkiye*, 19 November 2024.

³²⁰ Daily Sabah, *110 nabbed in weeklong operations against FETÖ in Türkiye*, 14 January 2025.

³²¹ Daily Sabah, *'Clamp' ops capture 71 FETÖ suspects across Türkiye*, 24 January 2025.

³²² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 44.

³²³ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, pp. 16, 31 and 32.

³²⁴ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

4.3 Involvement with the Gülen movement

Before the Gülen movement was banned, it was represented in all segments of Turkish society, as discussed in 4.1. In this context, one source pointed out that persecuted Gülenists came from all walks of life – from village shepherds to academics, from small businessmen to business tycoons, and from clerks to prosecutors.³²⁵

Nevertheless, as clearly indicated in preceding COI Reports, Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) – particularly in the security and judiciary sectors – attracted the negative interest of the Turkish authorities.³²⁶ The situation was unchanged during the reporting period, and Gülenist cadets, military personnel, gendarmes, police officers, judges and prosecutors in particular attracted the negative attention of the Turkish government.³²⁷ According to one source, this pattern was not surprising, as Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) in the security apparatus posed a greater threat to state security – in the authorities' perception – than would be the case with accountants, doctors or nurses affiliated with the Gülen movement.³²⁸

That Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) in particular drew negative attention within the security and justice system was also evident from the previously cited data from the Turkish Ministry of the Interior (see 4.2). Most of those arrested in the operations that took place between 10 January and 23 October 2024 were military personnel, police officers and members of the judiciary. The remaining suspects belonged to a 'residual category' referred to as *güncel yapılanma* ('actual structure'). Examples included citizens who gave financial (or other) support to imprisoned Gülenists and/or their relatives.³²⁹ This is addressed again later in this section.

On 28 December 2023, Minister Yerlikaya announced that 445 police officers had been suspended. They were under investigation for suspected links to the Gülen movement.³³⁰ This event once again highlighted that Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) in the security apparatus in particular attracted negative government attention.

Not all Gülen suspects who were arrested belonged to the police, military and civil service. As indicated before, there was a 'residual category'. This category included citizens who helped imprisoned relatives, friends and colleagues and/or their families. This assistance consisted of money, food or other resources. Turkish authorities suspected individuals who supported jailed Gülenists and/or their families of 'restructuring' the Gülen movement.³³¹

As stated in the preceding COI Report, it was relatively easy for people to be suspected of involvement in the Gülen movement.³³² This dynamic persisted during the reporting period. For example, one source was aware of a group of women and their daughters who had been detained. This group maintained contact with a woman who, in turn, had ties to the Gülen movement. At the time of writing, the

³²⁵ Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³²⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2021, p. 40. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 40.

³²⁷ Confidential source, 3 October 2024. Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³²⁸ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³²⁹ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³³⁰ Daily Sabah, *Hundreds of police officers linked to FETÖ suspended in Türkiye*, 29 December 2023. Duvar English, *445 police officers suspended in Turkey due to 'ties with Gülen network'*, 29 December 2023. HDN, *445 police officers suspended over FETÖ links, reveals minister*, 30 December 2023.

³³¹ Home Office, *Turkey, Gülenists*, October 2023, p. 8. Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, pp. 14–16. Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³³² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 45 and 46.

women and their adult daughters were still in prison; the minor daughters had been released after interrogation, according to the source.³³³

It should also be noted that non-Gülenists could also be branded as Gülenists and treated as such by the Turkish authorities. Examples in this regard could include opposition figures, trade union activists, journalists and academics who were critical of the Turkish government.³³⁴ For example, during the reporting period, a criminal lawyer named Dilek Ekmekçi was criminally prosecuted and placed in pre-trial detention on suspicion of membership of the Gülen movement. She had been critical of the sexual abuse of minors in state institutions.³³⁵ The same dynamics were present during preceding reporting periods.³³⁶

During the preceding reporting period, Turkish authorities used several criteria in prosecuting Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists), including having had a bank account with Bank Asya³³⁷ or having downloaded and used the ByLock app.³³⁸ These criteria remained in force during the reporting period,³³⁹ as also evidenced by the arrests discussed in 4.2.

The international human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) emphasised that, in practice, the Turkish authorities did not apply the criteria uniformly. For example, HRW described the persecution of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) as 'extremely arbitrary and unpredictable'.³⁴⁰ One source confirmed that the persecution of Gülenists was arbitrary in nature. For example, this source knew that some subscribers of the Gülenist newspaper *Zaman* ('Time') had been detained and imprisoned, while other *Zaman* subscribers had been left undisturbed. It remained unclear why one *Zaman* subscriber was arrested and the other not.³⁴¹

4.4 Legal process and societal interactions

Jurisprudence

As stated in the preceding COI Report, case law had tightened the use of criteria on ByLock and Bank Asya. Some rulings by the Constitutional Court (AYM) and the Court of Cassation clarified the conditions under which the criteria concerning ByLock and Bank Asya could be used as evidence of ties to the Gülen movement.³⁴² When asked, one source indicated that it was unclear to what extent these rulings were applied in practice in court proceedings. Because some lower courts disregarded judgments of higher courts (see 3.2), a lopsided situation had developed in the judicial sector, according to the source.³⁴³

During the reporting period, the case of Yalçınkaya stood out. This former teacher was arrested in 2016 and sentenced to six years and three months in prison in 2017 for membership of the Gülen movement. The conviction was largely based on his

³³³ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³³⁴ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 19.

³³⁵ Evrensel, *Terör örgütü üyeliğinden yargılanan Av. Dilek Ekmekçi tahliye edildi* ('Lawyer Dilek Ekmekçi, on trial for membership of a terrorist organisation, released'), 22 October 2024. MLSA, *Avukat Dilek Ekmekçi yeniden tutuklandı* ('Lawyer Dilek Ekmekçi was arrested again'), 24 October 2024. Bianet, *Arrested lawyer Dilek Ekmekçi begins hunger strike*, 18 November 2024.

³³⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 45.

³³⁷ Bank Asya was affiliated with the Gülen movement and lost its banking licence after the failed coup in 2016.

³³⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 45.

³³⁹ Home Office, *Turkey, Gülenists*, October 2023, p. 7. Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, pp. 22–26. Confidential source, 3 October 2024. Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³⁴⁰ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 8.

³⁴¹ Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³⁴² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 45.

³⁴³ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

use of the ByLock app. On 26 September 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that there had been an unfair judicial process. Turkish authorities ignored the ECtHR ruling.³⁴⁴ Yalçınkaya had since served his sentence, but the travel ban against him remained in place.³⁴⁵

At the time of writing, 62,250 cases were pending before the ECtHR. Of these, 23,150 cases, or 37.2%, came from Türkiye.³⁴⁶ It was unclear how many of these cases were linked to the Gülen movement.³⁴⁷ Given that Türkiye had disregarded the ECtHR's ruling on Yalçınkaya, there were fears that thousands of other convicted ByLock users would not be able to obtain justice either.³⁴⁸

According to HRW and a lawyer, the Turkish judiciary did not handle Gülen cases uniformly. For example, one defendant was acquitted and the other was convicted, even though the evidence was almost the same in both cases.³⁴⁹

Forced dismissals

During the reporting period, individuals who had been forcibly dismissed during the state of emergency (2016–2018) could face problems or inconvenience as a result. During the state of emergency, thousands of judges and prosecutors had been forcibly dismissed for ties (or alleged ties) to the Gülen movement. Some successfully challenged their forced dismissal. During the reporting period, the Turkish Council of State decided³⁵⁰ that 450 judges and prosecutors, who had been forcibly dismissed at the time, had to be reinstated to their positions. President Erdoğan publicly expressed his displeasure about this, describing the restoration decision as 'unacceptable'. Following this ruling, the Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) conducted a new survey of 387 judges and prosecutors.³⁵¹

As indicated in the March 2022 COI Report, if anyone had been forcibly dismissed due to actual or alleged terrorist ties, this was recorded in a database of the *Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu* (Social Security System, SGK).³⁵² This registration made it difficult for employees who had been discharged to get new jobs. If they applied for a new job, potential employers – in both the public and private sectors – could access the registration through a portal of the SGK. They often exhibited reluctance to hire individuals with such a registration. Citizens could access such registration in their *e-devlet* environment.³⁵³ *E-devlet* (literally, 'electronic government') is the digital government service counter for residents of Türkiye.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁴ Duvar English, *ECHR finds rights violation in case regarding Gülen network*, 26 September 2023. ECtHR, *Türkiye must address systemic problem of convictions for terrorism offences based decisively on accused's use of the ByLock messaging application*, 26 September 2023. De Volkskrant, *Europese mensenrechtenhof maakt gehakt van vonnis Turkse 'terreurverdachte'*, 28 September 2023. The Economist, *Turkey's president picks a fight with the Council of Europe*, 3 October 2023. EUObserver, *Erdoğan lashes out at ECHR's landmark 'anti-Turkey' ruling*, 13 October 2023. Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³⁴⁵ Confidential source, 21 December 2024.

³⁴⁶ ECtHR, *Pending applications allocated to a judicial formation*, undated, consulted on 18 November 2024.

³⁴⁷ Confidential source, 17 December 2024.

³⁴⁸ Confidential source, 21 December 2024.

³⁴⁹ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, pp. 45 and 46.

³⁵⁰ In Turkish, *Danıştay*.

³⁵¹ T24, *Erdoğan'ın tepkisinin ardından HSK'dan göreve iade edilen 387 hakim ve savcı hakkında inceleme kararı* ('Following Erdoğan's response, HSK decided to investigate 387 judges and prosecutors who have been returned to their old positions'), 17 February 2024. Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³⁵² The SGK falls under the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

³⁵³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 44. Confidential source, 10 February 2025.

³⁵⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 16.

This practice remained in force during the reporting period.³⁵⁵ For example, one source was aware of a former prosecutor who had been forcibly discharged due to alleged Gülen ties. After this discharge, the prosecutor aspired to a career in academia. According to the source, every time a university was about to hire the person, the procedure failed at the security check, at which point the university's attention was drawn to the registration in the SGK database.³⁵⁶

Yalçinkaya, the Gülenist teacher who had served his prison sentence, was also not allowed to practise his profession. Because of his SGK registration as a dismissed employee, he could not find work anywhere else. According to one source, he remained dependent on financial support from his siblings in France.³⁵⁷

It was unclear whether Gülenists who had been released were again at risk of trouble with Turkish authorities. One source shared that the authorities were reluctant to criminally prosecute released Gülenists again.³⁵⁸ Another source noted that released Gülenists were being monitored by authorities. If they re-established ties with other Gülenists, they risked new problems with the authorities, the source stated.³⁵⁹ This source did not specify what was meant by 're-establishing ties' and 'new problems'.

4.5 Relatives of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists)

As stated in the preceding COI Report, relatives of senior Gülenists in particular could count on negative attention from Turkish authorities.³⁶⁰ This situation persisted during the reporting period.³⁶¹ For example, Turkish authorities imprisoned the 78-year-old mother of Akın İpek, a prominent Gülenist. İpek was a business tycoon who had fled abroad.³⁶²

Relatives of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) could be hindered in social and labour market interactions.³⁶³ For example, one source had heard that relatives of Gülenists (or alleged Gülenists) were denied access to certain social services.³⁶⁴ Another source gave the example of a judge's son who had been forcibly dismissed. This son was not able to obtain a government job because of his father's past.³⁶⁵

4.6 Gülenists outside Türkiye

During the preceding reporting periods, the Turkish authorities' fight against the Gülen movement was not limited to the territory of Türkiye itself. For example, the *Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı* (national security service, MİT) transferred Gülen suspects from abroad to Türkiye, sometimes in cooperation with foreign security services.³⁶⁶

³⁵⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, pp. 35, 50, 51, 69 and 70. Confidential source, 3 October 2024. Confidential source, 4 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³⁵⁶ Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

³⁵⁷ Confidential source, 23 December 2024.

³⁵⁸ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³⁵⁹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 47 and 48.

³⁶¹ Confidential source, 4 November 2024.

³⁶² Serbestiyet, *Akın İpek'in annesi Melek İpek (78), FETÖ soruşturması kapsamında tutuklandı ('Melek İpek (78), mother Akın İpek, has been arrested as part of a FETÖ investigation')*, 9 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³⁶³ Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 42.

³⁶⁴ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

³⁶⁵ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

³⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 46.

During the current reporting period as well, Turkish authorities worked to bring Gülenists abroad to Türkiye. The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) concluded that this practice took place 'systematically'.³⁶⁷ The following examples are for illustrative purposes and cannot be considered exhaustive.

In early October 2023, the MİT brought a Gülen suspect, Koray Vural, to Türkiye from Tajikistan. He had allegedly coordinated activities of the Gülen movement in Central Asia and paid visits to Gülen in Pennsylvania.³⁶⁸

In late December 2023, the MİT arrested two Gülen suspects in Algeria: Mustafa Tan and Mustafa Bircan. They had allegedly engaged in activities of the Gülen movement in Algeria and maintained contact with Gülen movement leaders in the US.³⁶⁹ The North African country had previously extradited a Gülen suspect to Türkiye in 2020.³⁷⁰

On 18 October 2024 Kenya extradited four Turkish nationals at the request of Türkiye. They had been recognised as refugees in Kenya and belonged to the Gülen movement. The Turkish nationals were Mustafa Genç, Öztürk Uzun, Alparslan Taşçı and Hüseyin Yeşilsu. Genç was the headmaster of a public school established by the Omeriye Foundation, a charitable foundation affiliated with the Gülen movement. The Kenyan government confirmed the forced return of the four Turks to Türkiye through a written statement. In the statement, the Kenyan authorities only indicated that they had granted the Turkish extradition request. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN refugee agency, expressed 'extreme concern' about the fate of the four deportees. The deportation was condemned by an alliance of Kenyan NGOs, including the Kenyan branch of Amnesty International. The coalition spoke of a violation of the non-refoulement principle, or the prohibition against returning refugees to their countries of origin if they fear persecution.³⁷¹ One of Gülen's cousins had previously been transferred to Türkiye from the East African country in 2021.³⁷²

According to a December 2024 investigative article by *The Washington Post*, the extraditions described above were part of a wider pattern of transnational repression. In the past decade, 118 people had been transferred to Türkiye from abroad. Almost all cases involved people affiliated with the Gülen movement, in particular prominent representatives of the Gülen movement, financiers and individuals who maintained ties with Gülen himself. After returning to Türkiye, those extradited awaited criminal trials. In the process, they were charged with membership of an armed terrorist network. As far as is known, none of them had been acquitted. *The Washington Post* based the aforementioned findings on dozens of interviews with sources including Western and Turkish government officials, UN

³⁶⁷ CAT, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Türkiye*, 14 August 2024, p. 8.

³⁶⁸ Daily Sabah, *Turkish intelligence brings fugitive FETÖ member from Tajikistan*, 5 October 2023. HDN, *Key FETÖ member apprehended in Tajikistan*, 6 October 2023. Human Rights Watch (HRW), *We will find you', A global look at how governments repress nationals abroad*, February 2024, p. 19. Finnish Immigration Service, *Turkey*, June 2024, p. 33.

³⁶⁹ AA, *Turkish intelligence nabs 2 FETÖ fugitives in Algeria*, 27 December 2023. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye nabs fugitive FETÖ members in Algeria*, 27 December 2023.

³⁷⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2021, p. 44.

³⁷¹ Amnesty International, *Statement on the refoulement of four Turkish asylum seekers for immediate release*, 21 October 2024. BBC, *UN 'deeply concerned' Kenya returned Turkish refugees*, 21 October 2024. Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement*, 21 October 2024. Nation, *Kenya: 'Yes, we captured four refugees on behalf of Turkey'*, 21 October 2024. De Volkskrant, *Kenia deporteert vier Turkse vluchtelingen naar Turkije, gezin van een van hen woont in Nederland*, 22 October 2024. BBC, *'We live in fear' – forced expulsions taint Kenya's safe haven image*, 7 November 2024. The Washington Post, *Turkey exploits post-9/11 counterterrorism model to target critics in exile*, 15 December 2024.

³⁷² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 43.

advisers and victims of renditions and their relatives. The US daily had also consulted Turkish court documents and UN documents.³⁷³

On 31 December 2024, Kyrgyz authorities announced that all educational institutions of the Gülen movement in Kyrgyzstan had been transferred to the Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF).³⁷⁴ This foundation provides educational services abroad. Turkish authorities established the TMF in 2016 with the aim of taking over Gülen schools.³⁷⁵

³⁷³ The Washington Post, *Turkey exploits post-9/11 counterterrorism model to target critics in exile*, 15 December 2024.

³⁷⁴ Daily Sabah, *Kyrgyzstan transfers FETÖ-linked schools to Turkish Maarif Foundation*, 31 December 2024.

³⁷⁵ In Turkish, the TMF is known as *Türkiye Maarif Vakfı* (TMV). *Maarif* means 'education'. Additional information on the TMF is available at <https://turkiyemaarif.org>.

5 Kurds

5.1 Introduction

Kurds live mainly scattered across Iraq, Iran, Syria and Türkiye.³⁷⁶ The percentage of Kurds in Türkiye is estimated at twenty percent of the Turkish population.³⁷⁷ Kurds constitute the largest non-Turkish population group in Türkiye. They are not recognised as a national minority.³⁷⁸ The preceding COI Report contains more general and contextual information on the Kurds in Türkiye.³⁷⁹

This chapter examines the situation of Kurds, with a specific focus on those who are actively working to promote the political and cultural rights of their community. The way in which Turkish authorities restricted the use of the Kurdish language is described in 5.2, and several cases of anti-Turkish violence within Turkish society are addressed in 5.3. The position of the DEM party and its members and supporters is discussed in 5.4. Finally, the treatment of relatives of PKK members is examined in 5.5.

The situation of Kurds is also discussed elsewhere in this COI Report. The DEM election results in the March 2024 local elections are discussed in 1.1.3. The process of rapprochement between the People's Alliance and DEM is examined in 1.1.4. Information on the course of the armed struggle between the Turkish state and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) on Turkish soil is presented in 1.3.2. Information on the situation of Kurdish journalists and media is provided in 3.5.1, and the situation of Turkish conscripts is addressed in 9.3.

5.2 Kurdish language under pressure

Kurdish (known as *Kurmançî* in its own language) is the second most widely spoken language in Türkiye, after Turkish. The use of Kurdish is declining sharply, especially among Kurdish young people.³⁸⁰ The country has no official ban on the use of Kurdish. Turkish constitution recognises only Turkish as the official national language.³⁸¹ The Kurdish language thus enjoys no legal protection. During the reporting period, several situations occurred in which the use of Kurdish was curtailed or discouraged. Several illustrative examples are discussed below. These are used solely for illustrative purposes and should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

In late August 2023, Turkey's health ministry ensured that a digital health portal, which was initially available only in Turkish, was also displayed in five other languages: Arabic, German, English, French and Russian. This led to criticism from the DEM and Sezgin Tanrıkulu, a Republican People's Party (CHP) MP of Kurdish origin. They wanted to know why the portal was available in five other languages,

³⁷⁶ Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, p. xiii. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 49.

³⁷⁷ Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, p. 57.

³⁷⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 50.

³⁷⁹ Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, pp. 57 and 151.

³⁷⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 49 and 50.

³⁸⁰ Confidential source, 4 March 2024. De Volkskrant, *Het Koerdisch, lang inzet van strijd, verdwijnt uit Turkije*, 14 January 2025.

³⁸¹ Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, p. 153.

but not in Kurdish.³⁸² The Minister of Health, Fahrettin Koca, replied that services in other languages were for foreign patients and tourists. Turkish nationals were required to log in with a Turkish identification number, and users with a Turkish identification number were automatically redirected to the Turkish-language environment.³⁸³

Space for Kurdish was also curtailed in the cultural sector. On 16 January 2024, Turkish authorities banned a theatrical performance in Kurdish in the eastern town of Patnos. The authorities gave as their only reason that the performance would be 'inappropriate'. This caused surprise, as the performance had already been staged in other parts of Türkiye.³⁸⁴ On 21 February 2024, authorities banned a concert in Kurdish in the eastern city of Bingöl. The authorities gave no reason for doing so.³⁸⁵ In October 2024, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism decided that the film *Rojbash* was unsuitable for distribution. This feature film focused on a group of Kurdish actors. Kurdish was the main language heard in the film. The authorities gave no specific reason for the decision. The filmmaker interpreted the decision as a measure to curb the use of Kurdish.³⁸⁶

Kurdish was also under pressure elsewhere in the public realm. In July 2024, Turkish authorities removed traffic instructions in Kurdish³⁸⁷ that had been applied to the road surface. This took place in the cities of Batman, Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van.³⁸⁸ Local authorities in Diyarbakır and Mardin, which were linked to DEM, considered this measure an attack on the Kurdish language and culture, and they restored traffic instructions in Kurdish. In doing so, they aimed to emphasise the multilingual nature of the cities.³⁸⁹ In late September, the DEM-dominated Diyarbakır municipal council took the decision to install multilingual place-name and road signs.³⁹⁰

In September 2024, Turkish authorities stopped a decision by local authorities in Diyarbakır to name a city park after Rindêxan, a female figure in Kurdish culture. The Turkish authorities argued in this regard that the name was not in Turkish, but in a 'foreign language'.³⁹¹

On 24 September 2024, police raided two Kurdish language foundations and one Kurdish bookstore in Diyarbakır. In the process, they seized hundreds of books, newspapers and hard drives. According to Turkish authorities, the materials that were seized constituted propaganda for the PKK. The police also detained 23 employees. Political parties working for the political and cultural rights of Kurds, including DEM, condemned the actions of the authorities as an attack on Kurdish language and culture.³⁹²

³⁸² Bianet, *Criticism arises over exclusion of Kurdish in e-prescription system*, 28 August 2023.

³⁸³ Bianet, *Minister responds to criticism for exclusion of Kurdish in e-prescription system*, 29 August 2023.

³⁸⁴ Duvar English, *Turkish district governor finds Kurdish play 'inappropriate,' cancels performance*, 23 January 2024.

³⁸⁵ Bianet, *Metin Kahraman: 'We will file a lawsuit against the concert ban'*, 22 February 2024.

³⁸⁶ Duvar English, *Turkish Culture Ministry rules Kurdish film 'not suitable' for release*, 10 October 2024. Bianet, *Culture Ministry bans Kurdish-language film 'Rojbash'*, 11 October 2024.

³⁸⁷ This involved such inscriptions as *Pêşî Peya*. This literally means 'feet/pedestrians first', but it can be understood as 'pedestrian priority'.

³⁸⁸ Bianet, *Authorities remove Kurdish traffic signs in several cities*, 31 July 2024.

³⁸⁹ Bianet, *Kurdish traffic signs reinstated in Diyarbakır*, 2 August 2024.

³⁹⁰ Duvar English, *Diyarbakır Municipality introduces multilingual signboards despite AKP's opposition*, 29 September 2024.

³⁹¹ Duvar English, *Turkish district governor rejects Kurdish name for park, calling it 'foreign' language*, 23 September 2024.

³⁹² Bianet, *Police seize hundreds of books, periodicals on 'terrorism' suspicion in raid on Diyarbakır*, 24 September 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish police raids Kurdish language foundations, detains educators*, 25 September 2024.

On 22 December 2024, YEWKURD, an association of Kurdish publishers, announced that Turkish authorities had banned 120 books, magazines, newspapers and other publications in Kurdish in the previous three weeks. Some books dealt with politically sensitive topics, such as the course of the Syrian civil war in Afrin, a region in which many Kurds live. Other books did not, but were banned anyway, including a book on Kurdish mythology.³⁹³

Since 2012, students have been allowed to take Kurdish as an optional subject. During the reporting period, however, this option was available in thirteen cities. Some studies point to a lack of teachers to teach Kurdish. In other cases, parents were unaware that their children were allowed to receive Kurdish language instruction or did not dare to ask about it. In the latter case, they feared being associated with the PKK.³⁹⁴

Despite the existing pressure on the Kurdish language, the number of students of Kurdish increased. This university language programme was subject to a fixed quota. On 13 August 2024, it became clear that, for the first time, all 196 spots had been filled. In addition, in recent years, the number of secondary students taking Kurdish as an elective subject had increased from 20,000 to 25,000.³⁹⁵

On 18 December 2024, Ayşegül Doğan, a DEM MP, was allowed to begin her speech in the Turkish parliament in Kurdish. This appeared to break with the common language policy in parliament.³⁹⁶ Previously, MPs had been interrupted if they spoke in a language other than Turkish (for example, Kurdish or Laz).³⁹⁷ The minutes noted that Doğan had spoken 'non-Turkish' words.³⁹⁸

5.3 Anti-Kurdish violence within society

During the preceding reporting period, incidents of violence with an anti-Kurdish (actual or alleged) dimension took place. For example, in May 2023, a street musician by the name of Cihan Aymaz was stabbed to death in Istanbul. He sang mainly in Kurdish. A man in the audience had requested him to play a song popular amongst ultra-nationalist Turks.³⁹⁹ When Ayman refused this request, the man stabbed him to death.⁴⁰⁰ In July 2024, the perpetrator was sentenced to life in prison for manslaughter.⁴⁰¹

Media reports of anti-Kurdish violence appeared during this reporting period as well. On 15 November 2023, two students assaulted a fellow student at a private university in Istanbul. The three of them shared a dormitory. The two attackers no longer wished to share the dormitory with their fellow student, as the latter was of Kurdish origin. Audio recordings of the incident showed that the attackers explicitly addressed the victim about his ethnicity. The attackers in turn claimed to have been sexually harassed by their Kurdish roommate. The university administration decided to suspend both the victim and one of the attackers for a month.⁴⁰²

³⁹³ Duvar English, *Turkey bans 120 Kurdish-language publications in three weeks*, 22 December 2024.

³⁹⁴ Duvar English, *Kurds in Turkey struggle for access to Kurdish language education*, 5 December 2024.

³⁹⁵ Bianet, *'A response to pressure', Full enrollment in universities' Kurdish language departments*, 15 August 2024.

³⁹⁶ Bianet, *MHP speaker allows Kurdish MP to address parliament in Kurdish*, 18 December 2024.

³⁹⁷ Bianet, *MPs denied marking Mother Language Day in Kurdish and Laz language*, 22 February 2024.

³⁹⁸ Bianet, *MHP speaker allows Kurdish MP to address parliament in Kurdish*, 18 December 2024.

³⁹⁹ The song in question was *Ölürüm Türkiyem* ('I will die for my Türkiye').

⁴⁰⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 50 and 51.

⁴⁰¹ Duvar English, *Man receives life sentence for killing Kurdish street musician who refused nationalist song request*, 9 July 2024.

⁴⁰² Duvar English, *Fascists torture Kurdish Alevi student in Turkish university's dorm*, 4 January 2024.

On 16 December 2023, an anti-Kurdish incident took place at the airport of Trabzon, a city on the Black Sea. There, about twenty private security guards attacked four construction workers, as the latter were speaking Kurdish amongst themselves. The construction workers suffered minor injuries in the form of bruises and scars in the process. Police arrived at the scene and put an end to the scuffle. The Kurdish construction workers then filed a report.⁴⁰³ The state of affairs was unclear at the time of writing.⁴⁰⁴

5.4 DEM

5.4.1 DEM in brief

As indicated in 1.1.3, the HDP and the YSP continued under a new party name with the abbreviation 'DEM' as its acronym. In view of this, the abbreviation 'DEM' is used primarily in the remainder of this chapter. If the text specifically addresses situations occurring before this name change, the abbreviations 'HDP' and 'YSP' are used.

Like its predecessors, DEM is conveniently described as 'pro-Kurdish'. This is not surprising, as the party cadre and supporters are composed largely of Kurds. Nevertheless, this party is not exclusively Kurdish. In addition to working for the political and cultural rights of Kurds, DEM also focuses on gender equality, the environment, the working class and other ethnic and religious minorities, including Alevis (see 6.2), Arabs, Armenians (see 6.3), Assyrians and Laz.⁴⁰⁵

During the preceding reporting period, the Turkish government reduced the political room for manoeuvre of the HDP and the YSP.⁴⁰⁶ That trend continued throughout the reporting period. This section examines the various methods used to exert pressure on DEM, its representatives, members and supporters. For example, court cases took place (5.4.2), mayors were removed from office (5.4.3) and DEM members and supporters received negative attention from the Turkish authorities (5.4.4).

5.4.2 Court cases

During the preceding reporting period, two court cases threatened the survival of the HDP: the closure case and the 'Kobanî case'.⁴⁰⁷ The following is an update on both lawsuits and also covers subsequent lawsuits.

Closure case

The 'closure case' involved a charge to ban the HDP, alleging that the party threatened the unity of the Turkish nation and collaborated with the PKK.⁴⁰⁸ This case was still pending at the time of writing. If the Constitutional Court (AYM) had

⁴⁰³ Duvar English, *Turkish security guards assault workers for talking in Kurdish*, 17 December 2023.

⁴⁰⁴ Confidential source, 13 February 2025. Confidential source, 14 February 2025.

⁴⁰⁵ Bianet, *Co-chairpersons of DEM Party do not attend the briefing session in Parliament*, 17 January 2024. Bianet, *DEM Party unveils 'women's manifesto' for local elections*, 19 February 2024. Bianet, *DEM Party holds group meeting in seven languages*, 20 February 2024. Confidential source, 4 March 2024. Die Welt, *'We want a democratization of Turkey', Opposition politician Hatimogullari forges an alliance against President Erdogan*, 14 June 2024. Additional information on DEM is available at <https://www.demparti.org.tr/en/>.

⁴⁰⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 11.

moved to close down the HDP, 400 HDP politicians would have faced the threat of a blanket ban on political activities.⁴⁰⁹

Kobanî case

In the Kobanî case, 108 defendants stood trial. Many defendants belonged to the HDP, the predecessor of DEM. Turkish authorities held the defendants responsible for charges including the 37 deaths occurring during the 'Kobanî protests' of October 2014. These protests were linked to the siege of the town of Kobanî in northern Syria at that time.⁴¹⁰ In contrast, the HDP attributed the violence during the Kobanî protests to the Turkish police.⁴¹¹

The defendants had concerns about the reliability of witness statements that had been introduced as evidence. Mesut Bağcı, one of the Kurdish politicians on trial, pointed to the statement of an anonymous witness. This witness claimed that, in 2017 and 2018, Bağcı had allegedly resided in Qandil,⁴¹² a mountain range in northern Iraq where the PKK has its base of operations. During the same period, however, Bağcı had been incarcerated in Türkiye. Bağcı also criticised an anonymous witness known as 'Atlas', who had made identical statements about at least ten defendants.⁴¹³

On 16 May 2024, an Ankara court sentenced 24 people in first instance. The prison sentences imposed ranged from 9 to 42 years. It is not possible to address all convictions and acquittals in the Kobanî case in this COI Report. Consequently, several notable judgments are addressed. Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ, the two former co-chairs of the HDP who had been detained since 2016, were given prison terms of 42 and more than 32 years, respectively. Gültan Kışanak, a pro-Kurdish politician and a prominent figure in the Turkish-Kurdish women's movement, was sentenced in May 2024 to twelve years in prison. Because she had been detained since 2016 and had already served two-thirds of her prison sentence, she was released. Aysel Tuğluk, another seasoned pro-Kurdish politician and feminist, was acquitted.⁴¹⁴ Human Rights Watch (HRW) dismissed the Kobanî case as a 'political and unfair trial'. All those convicted indicated that they would appeal.⁴¹⁵ Their appeals were still in process at the time of writing.⁴¹⁶

First-instance convictions led to protests and discontent. On 22 May 2024, the DEM MPs walked from the parliament building to the Ministry of Justice during a protest march in Ankara.⁴¹⁷ Previously, the governors of twelve provinces had issued a four-day ban on demonstrations from 17 to 20 May 2024. The provinces in question were

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴¹⁰ In October 2014, Turkish Kurds took to the streets in several cities in Türkiye, calling on the Turkish government to relieve Kobanî (Arabisch: *Ayn al-Arab*). Inhabited predominantly by Syrian Kurds, this city had been under siege by IS at the time. Kobanî is also spelt as Kobani, Kobanê and Kobane.

⁴¹¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 54.

⁴¹² Also spelt as 'Kandil'.

⁴¹³ Bianet, *Defendant in Kobani case: 'I can't be in prison and in Qandil at the same time'*, 22 August 2023.

⁴¹⁴ In the past, Tuğluk had been sentenced to ten years in prison in another criminal case. This sentence was suspended during the preceding reporting period, as she had developed Alzheimer's disease. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 40.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Monitor, *Turkey hands Kurdish leaders heavy sentences, dimming hopes of democratic change*, 16 May 2024.

Bianet, *Verdict reached in Kobani trial, Selahattin Demirtaş receives 42-year prison sentence*, 16 May 2024. FT, *Turkish court hands down lengthy sentences to pro-Kurdish politicians*, 16 May 2024. HDN, *Former HDP leaders sentenced to lengthy prison terms*, 16 May 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish court gives jail sentences to several Kurdish politicians in Kobanê case, Demirtaş receives 42 years in total*, 17 May 2024. HRW, *Türkiye, Kurdish politicians convicted in unjust mass trial*, 17 May 2024. Trouw, *Lange celstraffen in politiek megaproces tegen Turkse pro-Koerdische leiders*, 17 May 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴¹⁶ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴¹⁷ Duvar English, *DEM Party MPs march to the Justice Ministry in protest against Kobanê case verdict*, 22 May 2024.

Adana, Batman, Bingöl, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkâri, İzmir, Kars, Mardin, Muş, Siirt and Tunceli.⁴¹⁸

A 'second Kobanî case' opened on 25 June 2024, with five former HDP MPs on trial for their alleged involvement in the 2014 Kobanî protests. One of the defendants was Garo Paylan, a former HDP MP of Armenian origin (see 6.3 for information on the situation of Armenians in Türkiye).⁴¹⁹ When the Kobanî case described above began, the defendants were still members of parliament and thus enjoyed parliamentary immunity from criminal prosecution. Since they no longer held this position, they could face criminal charges.⁴²⁰

On 19 July 2024, a court in Mersin imposed an additional 2.5-year prison sentence on Demirtaş, the former co-chair of the HDP, who has been detained since 2016. This court case was separate from the Kobanî case and focused on statements Demirtaş had made in the period from 2015 to 2017. The court found him guilty of publicly insulting the government, legal bodies and security apparatus of Türkiye.⁴²¹

5.4.3 *Mayors replaced by trustees*

Since 2016, Turkish authorities have been replacing pro-Kurdish mayors, who were democratically elected, with a pro-government *kayyum*⁴²² (which translates to 'trustee').

In the local elections of March 2019, the HDP won 65 mayoral seats in south-eastern Türkiye. In October 2021, there were still six municipalities that were controlled by the HDP.⁴²³ In June 2023, the number of HDP municipalities dropped to five, as the co-mayors of the south-eastern municipality of Patnos had been arrested on suspicion of procurement fraud.⁴²⁴ They were released again on 6 September 2023. Patnos therefore remained under HDP administration.⁴²⁵

After the March 2024 local elections (see 1.1.2), Turkish authorities continued replacing mayors with trustees.⁴²⁶ On 13 February 2025, the European Parliament passed a resolution expressing 'deep concern' about this course of action. The European Parliament called on Turkish authorities to release, exonerate and reinstate the replaced mayors to their posts.⁴²⁷ The following is a description of the opposition mayors who were removed from office during the reporting period.

In early June 2024, the police arrested Mehmet Siddık Akış, the DEM mayor of Hakkâri. He was replaced by a trustee.⁴²⁸ On 5 June 2024, Akış was sentenced to nineteen years and six months in prison for having ties with the PKK.⁴²⁹

⁴¹⁸ Duvar English, *Protest ban declared in 12 provinces after verdict in Kobanê case*, 17 May 2024.

⁴¹⁹ Duvar English, *Turkish court releases ex-HDP MP Kaya in 'second Kobane case'*, 26 June 2024.

⁴²⁰ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴²¹ Bianet, *Selahattin Demirtaş sentenced to additional 2.5 years in prison*, 19 July 2024. Duvar English, *Kurdish politician Demirtaş gets another jail term*, 20 July 2024.

⁴²² Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, pp. 23 and 25.

⁴²³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 54 and 55. Bianet, *HEDEP leader challenges 'trustees' to run for mayor*, 1 December 2023. Confidential source, 4 March 2024. ND, *Turkije zorgt ervoor dat Koerden nooit besturen*, 23 March 2024. De Volkskrant, *'Koerden worden buitenspel gezet'*, 26 March 2024.

⁴²⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 55.

⁴²⁵ Bianet, *Co-mayors of Patnos Municipality released*, 7 September 2023.

⁴²⁶ De Volkskrant, *Onzekerheid bij Koerdisch bestuur*, 20 February 2025.

⁴²⁷ European Parliament, *Human rights breaches in Türkiye, Nicaragua and Nigeria*, 13 February 2025.

⁴²⁸ Bianet, *Pro-Kurdish mayor arrested and replaced in Hakkari province*, 3 June 2024. HDN, *Hakkari mayor suspended after detention over alleged terror ties*, 3 June 2024. Le Monde, *En Turquie, les maires kurdes à nouveau dans le viseur d'Erdogan*, 4 June 2024.

⁴²⁹ Duvar English, *Turkey sentences Kurdish elected mayor of Hakkari to 20 years in prison*, 5 June 2024. HDN, *Hakkari mayor sentenced to 19 years for terrorism charges*, 5 June 2024.

The replacement of this DEM mayor by a trustee led to criticism and outrage. In a press statement, 28 provincial bar associations disapproved of Akış being removed from office. The national bar association (TBB) joined this. The Human Rights Association (İHD) also condemned the replacement of a mayor with a trustee.⁴³⁰ After DEM called on its supporters to protest, the authorities declared a ban on demonstrations in ten provinces: Ağrı, Batman, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Hakkâri, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Şırnak and Van.⁴³¹

On November 4, 2024, Turkish authorities removed Ahmet Türk,⁴³² Gülistan Sönük and Mehmet Karayılan – the DEM mayors of Mardin, Batman and Halfeti (a district in the province of Şanlıurfa) – from their posts. They were accused of having ties to the PKK, and they were replaced by pro-government trustees.⁴³³

In Mardin, Batman and Halfeti, DEM supporters took to the streets to protest against this. In Mardin and Halfeti, police deployed water cannons, rubber bullets and pepper spray against protesters. According to the Turkish Human Rights Association (İHD), police arrested at least 75 people in Batman.⁴³⁴ In total, authorities detained 250 people. Of these, 33 were taken into custody and charged.⁴³⁵ According to DEM, police in Batman assaulted detainees.⁴³⁶

The replacement of mayors was not limited to mayors of DEM background. On 31 October 2024, Turkish authorities arrested Özer. He was mayor of Esenyurt, a district in western Istanbul, on behalf of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Özer is originally from Van and is of Kurdish background. Esenyurt is home to a sizeable Kurdish community. The authorities accused Özer of having ties to the PKK and replaced him with a pro-government trustee. In response, the CHP and DEM organised a demonstration, in which thousands of people participated.⁴³⁷

On 20 November 2024, Turkish authorities removed the mayors of Tunceli and Ovacık, a district in Tunceli province, from their posts for alleged PKK membership. The incident involved the DEM mayor Cevdet Konak (Tunceli) and the CHP mayor Mustafa Sarıgül (Ovacık). In response, hundreds of people took to the streets in Tunceli. Police deployed rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the demonstrating crowd.⁴³⁸ In late November 2024, nine protesters had been placed in pre-trial detention.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁰ Duvar English, *Turkey faces protests over Hakkari mayoral takeover by gov't*, 4 June 2024.

⁴³¹ Duvar English, *Turkish governors ban protests after DEM Party's call against trustee mayors*, 3 June 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey faces protests over Hakkari mayoral takeover by gov't*, 4 June 2024.

⁴³² Türk would later be part of the DEM delegation during the rapprochement process, as described in 1.1.4.

⁴³³ Bianet, *Government removes pro-Kurdish mayors in Mardin, Batman, Urfa*, 4 November 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish gov't appoints trustees to oust 3 Kurdish mayors*, 4 November 2024. HDN, *Trustees appointed in southeast as three mayors dismissed over terror charges*, 4 November 2024. De Morgen, *Turkije vervangt drie pro-Koerdische burgemeesters door bureaucraten*, 5 November 2024.

⁴³⁴ Duvar English, *Turkish police brutally attack protests against trustee mayors*, 4 November 2024.

⁴³⁵ De Standaard, *Turkije, 250 arrestaties, 30 mensen aangeklaagd na protest tegen afzetting van pro-Koerdische burgemeesters*, 10 November 2024.

⁴³⁶ Bianet, *Mistreatment at Batman protests following pro-Kurdish mayor's removal*, published on 11 November 2024, updated on 12 November 2024.

⁴³⁷ Bianet, *Esenyurt mayor replaced by trustee, says investigation 'politically motivated'*, 31 October 2024. Bianet, *Thousands protest opposition municipality takeover in Istanbul*, 31 October 2024. Duvar English, *CHP holds rally against undemocratic removal of district mayor in front of municipality*, 31 October 2024. HDN, *Esenyurt mayor arrested, trustee appointed in his place*, 31 October 2024. Trouw, *Woede na arrestatie oppositieburgemeester Istanbul*, 1 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴³⁸ Duvar English, *Turkish court sentences two opposition mayors over 'terrorism' charges*, 21 November 2024.

⁴³⁹ Bianet, *Two mayors removed in Kurdish-populated Dersim city, sparking protests*, 22 November 2024.

⁴³⁹ Duvar English, *Turkish authorities arrest 9 anti-trustee protestors*, 27 November 2024. Bianet, *Nine arrested in Dersim over protests against removal of mayors*, 28 November 2024.

On 29 November 2024, the Turkish government unseated Ayvaz Hazır, the DEM mayor of Bahçesaray, from his post. Bahçesaray is a district in the eastern Turkish province of Van.⁴⁴⁰

On 10 January 2025, Turkish authorities made a number of arrests, including Hoşyar Sarıyıldız and Nuriye Arslan. They were the co-mayors of Akdeniz, a district in the southern Turkish city of Mersin, on behalf of DEM. Sarıyıldız and Arslan were suspected of PKK membership, spreading terror propaganda, financing a terror organisation and violating the Law on Meetings and Demonstration. In the district of Akdeniz, people took to the streets in protest. Police deployed water cannons and tear gas and detained at least five protesters.⁴⁴¹

On 28 January 2025, a court in Diyarbakır sentenced Sofya Alağaç, co-mayor of Siirt on behalf of DEM, to a prison term of six years and three months. She was convicted of membership of a terrorist organisation, namely the PKK. The conviction was related to her previous work as news editor at JINHA, a news agency of Kurdish and Yazidi women. After her conviction, Alağaç was replaced by a trustee.⁴⁴²

On 11 February 2025, Zeydan, the DEM mayor of Van, was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison for supporting a terrorist organisation and making propaganda for a terrorist organisation. After this conviction Zeydan was replaced by a trustee on 15 February 2025. Thousands of people protested against the measure, and police detained 127 protesters.⁴⁴³ About twenty of them were placed in pre-trial detention.⁴⁴⁴ Shortly after his election victory in March 2024, the provincial electoral council had already tried to remove Zeydan from office (see 1.1.3).

At the time of writing, as of the March 2024 local elections, eleven mayoral posts had been taken over by a trustee; nine from DEM and two from the CHP.⁴⁴⁵

5.4.4 *The repression of DEM in practice*

Arrest and detention

As stated in the preceding COI Report, around five thousand HDP members were in prison. It was difficult to keep track of the exact number of imprisoned HDP members, as HDP members were continuously being arrested and released.⁴⁴⁶

During the reporting period, DEM members kept going to and leaving prison. One source estimated the number of incarcerated DEM members at seven to eight

⁴⁴⁰ Rûdaw, *Turkey sacks another Kurdish mayor*, 29 November 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish gov't appoints trustee to replace pro-Kurdish Party mayor*, 30 November 2024. Bianet, *Another pro-Kurdish mayor removed from office*, 2 December 2024.

⁴⁴¹ Bianet, *Akdeniz district municipality co-chairs Hoşyar Sarıyıldız and Nuriye Arslan detained*, 10 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *Turkish police detain PKK-linked mayor in southern Mersin*, 10 January 2025. Duvar English, *Turkey detains pro-Kurdish DEM Party mayors, city council members*, 10 January 2025. HDN, *DEM Party co-mayors detained in Mersin*, 10 January 2025. Bianet, *Trustee appointed to DEM Party's Akdeniz Municipality*, 13 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye names trustee to Mersin after PKK-linked mayor's arrest*, 13 January 2025. Duvar English, *Ankara arrests pro-Kurdish party mayors, appoints trustee*, 14 January 2025.

⁴⁴² Bianet, *Siirt co-mayor sentenced to prison over past journalism activities*, 28 January 2025. Duvar English, *Turkish authorities sentence another Pro-Kurdish DEM Party mayor to prison*, 28 January 2025. HDN, *Siirt co-mayor sentenced on terrorism charges*, 28 January 2025. MLSA, *Former Jin News editor Sofya Alağaç sentenced to 6 years, 3 months in prison*, 28 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye replaces mayor in southeast after conviction on PKK charges*, 29 January 2025. P.A. Turkey, *Siirt co-mayor Sofya Alağaç sentenced to six years in prison*, 29 January 2025. Rûdaw, *Turkey sacks pro-Kurdish Siirt mayor*, 29 January 2025. Türkiye Today, *Siirt Mayor Sofya Alagac suspended from office by Ministry of the Interior*, 29 January 2025.

⁴⁴³ Türkiye Today, *Turkish Ministry of the Interior removes Van Mayor Abdullah Zeydan, appoints trustee*, 15 February 2025. Duvar English, *Turkey ousts another Kurdish mayor, appoints trustee in Van Municipality*, 16 February 2025.

⁴⁴⁴ Confidential source, 18 February 2025. Confidential source, 18 February 2025.

⁴⁴⁵ Confidential source, 17 February 2025.

⁴⁴⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 55.

thousand. This was based on media reports and signals from the field.⁴⁴⁷ In early January 2025, DEM had 14,741 members.⁴⁴⁸ This meant that, during the reporting period, about 47.49% to 54.27% of the DEM membership was in prison.

During the preceding reporting period, representatives and supporters of the YSP were subjected to intimidation, pressure and arrests by the Turkish authorities during the May 2023 parliamentary elections.⁴⁴⁹

This dynamic reasserted itself during the local elections in March 2024 (see 1.1.2 for additional information on these elections). For example, one source observed first-hand that DEM campaign buses were followed by riot police. Candidates and supporters were filmed, threatened and surrounded by police.⁴⁵⁰

Demonstrators

Demonstrations against the appointment of trustees (see 5.4.3 for further details on this practice) also triggered repression by the Turkish authorities. In November 2024, a source was on the ground in Batman. This source observed first-hand that plain-clothes police officers beat protesters and carried them off in private cars. At the police station, they had to listen to nationalist songs and were addressed with racist slurs, including 'mountain rats', referring to the mountainous habitat of the Kurds.⁴⁵¹ Demonstrators who were not officially members of DEM also faced arrest and criminal charges.⁴⁵²

Use of informants

As stated in the preceding COI Report, members of the HDP's youth wing in particular were pressured by Turkish authorities to serve as *ajanlar* ('informants'). In exchange for reporting other individuals within the Kurdish movement, these informants were given reduced sentences or released.⁴⁵³

Media reports emerging during the reporting period, provided insight into the practice described above. The reports involved a young man named Ümit Akbıyık. This individual had initially been active in the youth wing of the HDP, but eventually became an informant who made incriminating statements about more than six hundred people.⁴⁵⁴

Akbıyık became a victim of police violence as a member of the HDP's youth organisation. On 16 July 2019, he planned to attend a festival of the HDP's youth wing in Diyarbakır. The event was aimed at raising awareness amongst young people about the dangers surrounding drug use. The authorities banned the festival and police fired rubber bullets into Akbıyık's legs at close range. This resulted in oedema⁴⁵⁵ in both his legs.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁴⁷ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴⁴⁸ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye's AK Party boasts most members in crowded political scene*, 7 January 2025.

⁴⁴⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 55.

⁴⁵⁰ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴⁵¹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴⁵² Confidential source, 13 February 2025. Confidential source, 14 February 2025.

⁴⁵³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 56.

⁴⁵⁴ Bianet, *600'den fazla kişinin dosyasında tanık olan bir isim: Ümit Akbıyık ('Ümit Akbıyık, a name mentioned as a witness in the files of over 600 people')*, 26 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁵ Oedema is the presence of fluid in areas of the body where little or no fluid is normally present.

⁴⁵⁶ Artı Gerçek, *Polis plastik mermi sıktı, gencin bacaklarında ödem oluştu ('Police fired rubber bullets causing oedema in a young man's legs')*, published on 18 July 2019, updated on 14 November 2019. HDP, *Gençlik Meclisimize yönelik polis saldırısını şiddetle kınıyoruz ('We strongly reject police violence against our HDP's youth organisation')*, 18 July 2019.

In 2023, however, his name surfaced as a witness in the criminal files of arrested lawyers, journalists, artists and politicians.⁴⁵⁷ There were concerns about the reliability of his statements. For example, between 10 and 12 January 2023, he had made incriminating statements about 669 people. A lawyer for the suspects wondered how someone could make detailed statements about hundreds of people in such a short space of time. In addition, the same lawyer observed a discrepancy between Akbıyık's written and spoken Turkish. His statements were written in formal and legal Turkish, while he spoke a regional variant of Turkish, which was riddled with language errors.⁴⁵⁸ It also emerged that Akbıyık had made his statements without the prescribed presence of a lawyer.⁴⁵⁹

The scale on which the use of informants occurred is not known.

Circumstances that led to increased government attention

The preceding COI Report listed specific circumstances and activities that might cause individuals to be targeted by the Turkish authorities. In this context, 'targeted' refers to arrests, detentions, criminal investigations, prosecutions and convictions.⁴⁶⁰

During the reporting period, the same conditions and activities seemed to be in force with regard to DEM members and supporters, including:

- posting, sharing and liking pro-DEM messages on social media;
- participating in demonstrations (for example, against the appointment of trustees);
- giving or attending press statements;
- sending money to incarcerated relatives (which could be seen as financially supporting the PKK).⁴⁶¹

The summary above should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list. Anti-terror legislation in Türkiye is broad and vaguely formulated, such that Turkish authorities could use a variety of circumstances and activities to target a DEM member or supporter.⁴⁶²

5.4.5 *Treatment of relatives of HDP members*

As indicated in the preceding COI Report, relatives of HDP members could also attract the negative attention from Turkish authorities.⁴⁶³

This situation remained the same for the relatives of DEM members during the reporting period. For example, in some cases, relatives of DEM members were unable to obtain government jobs. If they sent money to an incarcerated relative who was a DEM member, they risked being criminally prosecuted themselves for financially supporting the PKK.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁷ Bianet, *600'den fazla kişinin dosyasında tanık olan bir isim: Ümit Akbıyık*, 26 September 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ Bianet, *Controversial confessor 'identified 669 suspects in 32 hours'*, 30 November 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ MLSA, *Police statement of informant Ümit Akbıyık without a lawyer*, 21 May 2024.

⁴⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 56.

⁴⁶¹ Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

⁴⁶² Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

⁴⁶³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 56 and 57.

⁴⁶⁴ Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

One source indicated that relatives of DEM members had been followed, detained and/or interrogated by police or security forces. There were also instances in which relatives of DEM members were pressured to testify against other DEM members at large. In some cases, individuals were ineligible for scholarships, loans, health insurance or social benefits because a relative was a member of DEM. The aforementioned forms of repression were used primarily against parents, spouses, siblings and children of DEM members, the source noted.⁴⁶⁵

During the reporting period, it remained unclear at what scale these practices occurred and which relatives had become targets for the Turkish authorities under which circumstances.

5.4.6 *Societal intolerance towards DEM*

During the preceding reporting period, the HDP and the YSP – the predecessors of DEM – faced not only repression from the side of the Turkish authorities, but also aggression from Turkish society.⁴⁶⁶

During the reporting period, DEM faced intolerance from society. On 28 September 2024, a local DEM party office in Istanbul was fired upon. No one was present at the time of the shooting, and there were no casualties. The authorities launched an investigation.⁴⁶⁷ On the night of 24/25 October 2024, the DEM headquarters in Ankara was attacked. In the process, the signboard, doors and windows were damaged.⁴⁶⁸

5.5 **Treatment of PKK relatives**

The armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK on Turkish soil is discussed in 1.3.2. This section examines how Turkish authorities treated relatives of PKK members.

As noted in preceding COI Reports, relatives of PKK members (or alleged PKK members) could be subjected to searches of their homes or be deliberately thwarted by Turkish authorities.⁴⁶⁹

The situation described above remained the same during the reporting period. For example, PKK relatives were not eligible for government jobs.⁴⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the attack on the TUSAŞ complex near Ankara (see 1.3.2), a private security guard employed by the municipality of Izmir was discharged because he was a brother of one of the attackers.⁴⁷¹

One source indicated that relatives of PKK operatives were subjected to surveillance, detained and/or forced by the Turkish security apparatus to provide information about PKK operatives. If relatives sent money to political prisoners, they could be criminally investigated and prosecuted for financially supporting the PKK. Relatives of PKK members were also subjected to searches of their homes. These were carried out by special masked units. According to this source, house raids were frequently

⁴⁶⁵ Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

⁴⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 57.

⁴⁶⁷ Bianet, *Pro-Kurdish DEM's office in Istanbul targeted in armed attack*, 30 September 2024.

⁴⁶⁸ Rûdaw, *DEM Party headquarters attacked in Ankara*, 25 October 2024.

⁴⁶⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 57 and 58.

⁴⁷⁰ Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

⁴⁷¹ Bianet, *Brother of PKK militant involved in Ankara attack dismissed from municipal job*, 1 November 2024.

accompanied by assault and detention. The source also noted that the aforementioned forms of repression were used primarily against parents, spouses, siblings and children of PKK members.⁴⁷²

It remained unclear at what scale these practices occurred and which relatives had become targets for the Turkish authorities under which circumstances.

⁴⁷² Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

6 Other ethnic and religious minorities

6.1 Introduction

The Turkish constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Türkiye is a secular republic that maintains separation between state and religion. Most residents of Türkiye adhere to Sunni Islam. Sunnism dominates public life. The Turkish citizenship ideal focuses on being Turkish and Sunni. During the reporting period, members of ethnic and religious minorities who deviated from this norm could experience problems in the form of exclusion, discrimination and aggression.⁴⁷³ This is discussed in further detail in this chapter.

Türkiye is home to several ethnic and religious minorities. The Treaty of Lausanne was signed on 24 July 1923. The borders of modern-day Türkiye were largely defined in this Swiss city. This treaty recognised only Armenians, Greeks and Jews as minorities in Türkiye.⁴⁷⁴

It is beyond the scope of this COI Report to cover every minority group. The situation of the Kurds, and especially their political representatives, is described in the previous chapter. This chapter provides a closer examination of other minorities, both recognised and unrecognised, that stood out during the reporting period. The minorities are discussed below in alphabetical order.

6.2 Alevism

Alevism comprises Shia, Sunni and pre-Islamic influences. There are different views on Alevism, including by Alevism themselves. Some consider Alevism as a branch of Islam. Others consider it a separate religion from Islam.⁴⁷⁵

Alevism constitute the largest religious minority in the country.⁴⁷⁶ The exact number of Alevism in Türkiye is unknown. For example, some Alevism do not come out openly for their faith for fear of discrimination, unfair treatment and exclusion.⁴⁷⁷ Estimates of the size of the Alevism community in Türkiye range from around ten to forty percent of the population.⁴⁷⁸ Two sources estimate the number of Alevism in Türkiye at over twenty million.⁴⁷⁹ One source added that Türkiye has more than five thousand *cemevis* (Alevism places of worship).⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, October 2019, pp. 22, 23 and 46. Orhan Kemal Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey, An evaluation from the perspective of human rights*, published in 2020, pp. 3, 4, 63, 64, 66 and 67. Trouw, *Volgens historicus Mahmut Erciyas hebben alevieten alle reden om beducht te zijn*, 18 June 2023. Yonucu, Deniz, 'Sectarianism as racism, The collective punishment of Alevism communities in Turkey', Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 65(3), 6 November 2023, pp. 54 and 57. Bianet, 'The racist hatred that could enable new pogroms is deeply present in Turkey', 6 September 2024.

⁴⁷⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, October 2019, p. 23. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 50.

⁴⁷⁵ Upal and Cusack (ed.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, p. 298. Trouw, *Volgens historicus Mahmut Erciyas hebben alevieten alle reden om beducht te zijn*, 18 June 2023. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 25. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁷⁶ Upal and Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, p. 279. Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, p. 69.

⁴⁷⁷ Yonucu, Deniz, 'Sectarianism as racism', Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 65(3), 6 November 2023, p. 49.

⁴⁷⁸ Minority Rights Group, *Alevism in Türkiye*, updated in June 2018. Yonucu, Deniz, 'Sectarianism as racism', Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 65(3), 6 November 2023, p. 49.

⁴⁷⁹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁰ Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

The Alevis have traditionally maintained a problematic relationship with the Turkish state. Two main issues can be identified in this relationship: the recognition of Alevis as a religious community and the exemption of religious education.⁴⁸¹ These two matters are interrelated and are detailed below.

Within the Turkish government, *Diyanet* is the Directorate of Religious Affairs. *Diyanet* has a sizeable budget at its disposal.⁴⁸² At the time of writing, the proposal to allocate a budget of around €3.6 billion to *Diyanet* for the year 2025 was under discussion. That was as much as the budget of six other ministries combined: the Ministries of the Interior; Foreign Affairs; Trade; Culture and Tourism; Industry and Technology; and Energy.⁴⁸³

Religious minorities, including Alevis, were displeased that *Diyanet* was spending money exclusively for the benefit of Sunni Islam. The Alevi community could not count on financial support from *Diyanet*, as the Turkish government did not recognise it as a religious community.⁴⁸⁴

The issue regarding religious education was also a source of discomfort for the Alevi community. Religion is a compulsory subject in Turkish primary and secondary schools. This school subject focuses mainly on Sunni Islam. Members of recognised minorities (such as Jews) may receive exemptions from this requirement. In contrast, Alevi, atheist and agnostic students are not eligible for exemption.⁴⁸⁵

In November 2022, the Turkish government created an agency for Alevis: the Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Cemevi Presidency. This agency did not fall under *Diyanet*, but under the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism.⁴⁸⁶ According to the authorities, this was because Alevism did not constitute a religious movement, but was a cultural and folkloric affair.⁴⁸⁷ Opinions within the Alevi community were mixed with regard to the creation of an agency under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Some saw it as a step forward in the emancipation process of Alevis, while others felt offended by it.⁴⁸⁸

Alevis did not enjoy national recognition as a religious community. On 13 September 2024, the municipality of Istanbul decided to recognise cemevis as places of worship. The municipal administration was controlled by the Republican People's Party (CHP), the country's largest opposition party. The CHP administration thus wanted to make it clear that it no longer distinguished between Sunni mosques,

⁴⁸¹ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 60–62. Upal and Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, pp. 297 and 298. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye establishes Cemevi Presidency to address Alevi citizen's problems*, 9 November 2022. Trouw, *Volgens historicus Mahmut Erçiyas hebben alevieten alle reden om beducht te zijn*, 18 June 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye's Alevi community gets lifeline with Cemevi Presidency*, 2 December 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁸² Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 36 and 65. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁴⁸³ Duvar English, *Turkish top religious body demands 130 bln liras for 2025 budget*, 20 October 2024.

⁴⁸⁴ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 36 and 65. Trouw, *Volgens historicus Mahmut Erçiyas hebben alevieten alle reden om beducht te zijn*, 18 June 2023. Yonucu, Deniz, 'Sectarianism as racism', *Institute of Race Relations*, Vol. 65(3), 6 November 2023, p. 54. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁵ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 65 and 66. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁶ In Turkish, this state entity is known as *Alevi-Bektaşî Kültür ve Cemevi Başkanlığı*.

⁴⁸⁷ Bianet, *Türkiye sets up agency for unrecognized Alevi minority amid 'assimilation' criticism*, 9 November 2022. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye establishes Cemevi Presidency to address Alevi citizen's problems*, 9 November 2022. Trouw, *Alevieten kijken vol wantrouwen naar speciaal Turks Alevietenministerie, 'Een stap in de verkeerde richting'*, 28 January 2023. Daily Sabah, *Türkiye's Alevi community gets lifeline with Cemevi Presidency*, 2 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁸ Trouw, *Alevieten kijken vol wantrouwen naar special Turks Alevietenministerie*, 28 January 2023. Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

which could already count on support from the municipality, and Alevi cemevis.⁴⁸⁹ One source regarded this decision as a positive development, but said that it was too early to determine its impact.⁴⁹⁰ Another source interpreted the municipality of Istanbul's decision as a sympathetic gesture, but added that such a gesture did not represent a real solution to the grievances of the Alevis.⁴⁹¹

On 20 January 2025, President Erdoğan met with Ahmet Uğurlu, a leading figure in the Alevi community. Uğurlu made several wishes known to President Erdoğan, including the establishment of schools in which *dedes* (Alevi faith leaders) could be trained and the provision of funding, which could be used to pay cemevi staff.⁴⁹²

The southern province of Hatay is home to a community of Arabic-speaking Alawites. Their fellow believers also live in neighbouring Syria. There are similarities and differences between the Alevi and Alawite faiths. Both Alevis and Alawites revere Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib,⁴⁹³ the nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. The names of both faith groups carry the same meaning: 'followers of Ali'.⁴⁹⁴ According to one source, there were about ten thousand Alawites in Türkiye. No further specific information was known about the social situation of this community.⁴⁹⁵

6.3 Armenians

The exact number of Armenians in Türkiye is unknown, for several reasons. For example, some Armenians do not openly identify as Armenian for fear of discrimination, unfair treatment and exclusion. In addition, some residents of Türkiye are unaware of their Armenian background. Their ancestors adopted Islam in the past – at times under force. In some cases, grandparents disclose the 'family secret' to their descendants only on their deathbed. In this context, the term 'hidden Armenians' is used.⁴⁹⁶ According to one source, the Armenian community in Türkiye consists of about 50,000 people.⁴⁹⁷

By far the majority of Armenians live in Istanbul. The Armenian community in Türkiye has 56 churches – 48 of which are active – and 20 cemeteries. In addition, around three thousand students are being educated at sixteen Armenian schools. Armenians in Türkiye are members of several denominations: Catholic, Protestant and Apostolic churches. These denominations receive no financial support from Diyanet, and they must provide for themselves. They are therefore dependent on private donations.⁴⁹⁸

During the reporting period, the Turkish parliament counted one MP of Armenian origin: Sevan Sivacioğlu of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the country's ruling party. Before the May 2023 parliamentary elections, the parliament had three MPs of Armenian background.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁸⁹ Duvar English, *Istanbul Municipality recognizes cemevis as 'places of worship'*, 13 September 2024.

⁴⁹⁰ Confidential source, 2 December 2024.

⁴⁹¹ Confidential source, 4 December 2024.

⁴⁹² Daily Sabah, *Alevi community seeks new rights as top figure meets Erdoğan*, 22 January 2025.

⁴⁹³ Also spelt as *Alī ibn Abī Tālib*.

⁴⁹⁴ Upal and Cusack (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, published in 2021, pp. 279, 281, 287, 291, 293 and 299. Yonucu, Deniz, 'Sectarianism as racism', Institute of Race Relations, Vol. 65(3), 6 November 2023, p. 49. Confidential source, 5 December 2024.

⁴⁹⁵ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁴⁹⁶ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 69–73. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁴⁹⁷ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁴⁹⁸ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁴⁹⁹ ARMENPRESS, *1/600, Turkish-Armenian representation in new parliament drops sharply after May 14 elections*, 17 May 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

Intolerance

Intolerance and aggression towards Armenians have both ethnic and religious dimensions. This is because Armenians have their own ethnicity and adhere to a movement within Christianity.⁵⁰⁰ Several anti-Armenian incidents took place in Türkiye in 2020. For example, two Armenian church buildings in Istanbul were targeted for vandalism and blaring motorcades of nationalist Turks swept through predominantly Armenian neighbourhoods in Istanbul.⁵⁰¹ As far as is known, no such incidents took place during the reporting period. According to one source, however, Armenians were regularly a target for hate speech on social media.⁵⁰²

One source noted that, although physical hate incidents were not that common, Armenians were hindered in daily life and social interaction. For example, Armenians were at times discriminated against or insulted in the workplace or in the Turkish army. In addition, some landlords refused to rent flats to Armenians. It was reportedly also difficult for Armenians to obtain government jobs, with the exception of positions in academia.⁵⁰³

In early August 2024, a violent incident took place on Kınalıada (one of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara), with a possible anti-Armenian dimension. The incident involved a conflict between Garo Kaprielyan (a prominent member of the Armenian community) and a supermarket employee. Kaprielyan accused the supermarket of creating a nuisance. At this, he was attacked by the employee. Kaprielyan sustained a broken finger and bruises on his face from the attack. According to the victim, the attacker had allegedly used such expressions as 'dirty Armenian'. The supermarket employee admitted to pushing Kaprielyan, but denied using racist language. At the time of writing, the case was pending in court.⁵⁰⁴

Armenian language

The Armenian language has two variants: Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian. The Armenian community in Türkiye traditionally speaks Western Armenian, whereas Eastern Armenian is common in Armenia itself. In Türkiye, there is no official ban on using the Armenian language in public spaces. One source noted that, in the past, Armenians had been reluctant to speak their own language on the streets. Younger generations of Armenians are more inclined to do so. The use of Armenian in public nevertheless remains context-dependent. The source noted that, in the Black Sea region, which is known for its conservative and nationalistic attitudes, Armenians purportedly feel that they have less leeway to speak Armenian in public.⁵⁰⁵

1915–1917 Massacres of Armenians

As indicated in the preceding COI Report, the 1915–1917 massacres of Armenians were a sensitive issue. When the human rights defender Öztürk Türkdoğan called for the aforementioned events to be recognised as a 'genocide', he was prosecuted under Article 301 of the Penal Code for insulting the Turkish nation. In July 2023, Türkdoğan was acquitted of this charge, as his call fell under the right to freedom of expression.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁰ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2021, p. 55.

⁵⁰² Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰³ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰⁴ Agos, *Patrik Maşalyan Kınalıada'da saldırıya uğrayan Garo Kaprielyan'ı ziyaret etti* ('Patriarch Maşalyan visited Garo Kaprielyan, who was attacked on Kınalıada'), 3 August 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰⁵ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 24.

Despite the aforementioned acquittal, the massacres of Armenians in 1915–1917 remained a fraught subject during the reporting period.⁵⁰⁷ On 24 April 2024,⁵⁰⁸ a guest speaker on *Açık Radyo* ('Open Radio')⁵⁰⁹ described the events occurring in 1915–1917 as 'genocide'. In response, the *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu* (Radio and Television Supreme Council, RTÜK)⁵¹⁰ imposed a fine on the radio station in question. *Açık Radyo* did not pay the fine, whereupon the RTÜK revoked its broadcasting licence. On 16 October 2024, the station made its final broadcast.⁵¹¹

Further information on freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Türkiye is presented in 3.5.

Armenian citizenship

Armenian Turks have the possibility to obtain Armenian citizenship. Türkiye and Armenia do not maintain diplomatic relations with each other. Consequently, Armenia has no diplomatic mission in Türkiye, and the Turkish-Armenian land border is closed. Applicants must travel to Armenia by air. For the application, they must submit several documents, including a baptismal certificate. In the past, the processing of an application took three to four months; today, the processing time is said to be up to a year. Many Armenians in Türkiye are reportedly applying for Armenian citizenship.⁵¹²

6.4 Jews

The Jewish community in Türkiye has around 15,000 to 20,000 members. Most Turkish Jews are descendants of Sephardic Jews who had fled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire in the late fifteenth century. Traditionally, they speak Ladino, a language closely related to Spanish. The language is now in danger of falling into disuse. Younger generations of Turkish Jews speak mainly Turkish.⁵¹³

Turkish society was affected by the escalated conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories. As a result, anti-Semitism rose sharply in Türkiye. Anti-Semitic expressions manifested themselves mainly online. A few incidents occurred in the physical space. For example, in Izmir, several synagogues were smeared with expressions of hate speech.⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁷ Agos, *Public commemorations of the Armenian Genocide in Istanbul, A light of hope?*, 19 October 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵⁰⁸ Every year on 24 April, the victims of the 1915–1917 massacres of Armenians are commemorated. This is because hundreds of Armenian intellectuals were arrested and deported in Istanbul on 24 April 1915. This date is considered the starting point of the massacres of the Armenians. Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, p. 24. Clingendael Institute, *Eindelijk volledige erkenning van de Armeense Genocide?*, 28 April 2021.

⁵⁰⁹ *Açık Radyo* focused particularly on social, cultural and political issues. The station thus reached a relatively large listening audience in Istanbul. Additional information on this radio station is available at <https://apacikradyo.com.tr/what-acik-radyo>.

⁵¹⁰ Additional information on the RTÜK is available at <https://www.rtuk.gov.tr/en>.

⁵¹¹ Duvar English, *Turkish media watchdog revokes radio channel's license over Armenian Genocide remarks*, 3 July 2024. Bianet, *Açık Radyo shuts down following license revocation over Armenian genocide remarks*, published on 16 October 2024, updated on 17 October 2024. Agos, *Açık Radyo, RTSC and Constitutional Court's landmark decision*, 18 October 2024. Confidential source, 4 November 2024. Interview with Yaman Akdeniz (cyber rights activist and co-founder of the Freedom of Expression Association, İFÖD), 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵¹² Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵¹³ Daily Sabah, *Reviving endangered Ladino language in Turkey*, 20 February 2022. The Times of Israel, *'Jews not allowed', As Erdogan praises Hamas, antisemitism rages in Turkey*, 30 October 2023. Confidential source, 12 December 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵¹⁴ The Times of Israel, *'Jews not allowed'*, 30 October 2023. Turkey recap (Tr), *With Israel at war, Turkey's Jewish community faces new threats, old concerns*, 8 November 2023. Bianet, *Synagogues vandalized in Izmir, 'Turkey's Jews are living on the edge since the war began'*, published on 10 October 2024, updated on 11 October 2024.

In its policy, the Turkish government made a clear distinction between the state of Israel and the Jewish community in Türkiye. It criticised Israel, but sought to protect the Turkish Jewish community. Turkish authorities took reports of anti-Semitism seriously and guarded the Jewish school and synagogues. The vandals who had defaced the synagogues in Izmir were arrested after a short time.⁵¹⁵ According to one source, Turkish authorities protected the Turkish Jewish community 'adequately'.⁵¹⁶

In November 2024, Zvi Kogan, a rabbi of Israeli and Moldovan citizenship, was kidnapped and murdered in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). On 26 November 2024, three Uzbeks suspected of the murder landed in Istanbul.⁵¹⁷ Turkish authorities arrested the suspects and extradited them to the UAE.⁵¹⁸

The chief rabbi of Türkiye, Ishak Haleva, died on 14 January 2025. President Erdoğan expressed his condolences to the Jewish community in Türkiye.⁵¹⁹

In February 2025, the director of the National Security Service (MİT) announced that several attacks against the Turkish-Jewish community had been foiled in 2024.⁵²⁰

The Turkish Jewish community was forced to keep a low profile. For example, since 7 October 2023, the date when the conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories underwent an escalation of violence, it has not openly celebrated the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.⁵²¹ Given that the Turkish Jewish community has no ultra-Orthodox influences, it was already not very visible on the streets of Türkiye. For example, one source noted that Turkish Jewish men are not accustomed to wearing a *kippa* (skullcap) or *peiyot* (side curls).⁵²²

According to one source, virtually all Turkish Jews of Sephardic origin now had Spanish citizenship. Incidentally, the criterion for this was not whether a person actively practiced Judaism, but whether the person was of Sephardic descent and thus maintained a historical link with Spain. The same source noted that Ashkenazi Jews, who have a different area of origin, were therefore not eligible for Spanish citizenship.⁵²³

6.5 Protestants

Estimates of the number of Protestants in Türkiye vary. James Bultema, an expert on Protestantism in Türkiye, estimated the number of Protestants in Türkiye at ten thousand. He also pointed out that Protestants in Türkiye were not a monolithic entity. They adhered to various denominations, including Calvinism, Arminianism,

⁵¹⁵ Confidential source, 12 December 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵¹⁶ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵¹⁷ The names of the Uzbek suspects were Olimpi Toirovich, Makhmudjon Abdurakhim and Azizbek Kamlovich.

⁵¹⁸ Reuters, *Turkey helped UAE to arrest suspects accused of killing Israeli rabbi*, 26 November 2024. The Independent, *Turkey reportedly arrested suspects in Israeli-Moldovan rabbi in UAE as they left Istanbul airport*, 26 November 2024. The Times of Israel, *UAE thanks Turkey for help apprehending suspects in murder of Chabad Rabbi Kogan*, 26 November 2024.

⁵¹⁹ Bianet, *Isak Haleva, Chief Rabbi of Turkey, dies*, 14 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *Chief rabbi of Türkiye's Jewish community passes away*, 14 January 2025. Şalom Turkey, *We have lost the Chief Rabbi of Turkey, Rabbi Isak Haleva*, 14 January 2025.

⁵²⁰ Daily Sabah, *Turkish intel thwarts attacks targeting non-Muslims in 2024*, 12 February 2025.

⁵²¹ Confidential source, 12 December 2023. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵²² Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁵²³ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

Anglicanism, Lutheranism and Baptism.⁵²⁴ Another source estimated the number of Protestants in Türkiye at around five to six thousand.⁵²⁵

Protestants in Türkiye encounter several problems. The Turkish government does not recognise them as a religious community. As a result, they cannot obtain a licence to open a church building. At most, Protestants can establish an association, foundation or cultural centre, although such entities do not enable them to act openly as a denomination.⁵²⁶

For example, one source was aware of a Protestant congregation applying for a permit for a church building in Diyarbakır. Both the municipality and the governor rejected the application, stating as their reason that there was no space available for a church. The source noted that, at the same time, the same authorities did make space available for mosques and Quranic schools.⁵²⁷

There were also instances in which Turkish authorities expelled foreign Protestant clerics from the country.⁵²⁸ For example, during the reporting period, the Constitutional Court (AYM), the highest court in Türkiye, upheld the deportation of nine foreign Protestant clerics. With their 'missionary activities', they allegedly posed a threat to the country's national security. Those affected had the option of appealing to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).⁵²⁹

Assessments vary concerning the impact of the deportation of foreign Protestant clerics. Two sources pointed out that Protestants in Türkiye were a relatively young community and consisted primarily of converts from Muslim backgrounds. With the deportation of foreign Protestant clerics, some congregations were in danger of being left without a pastor.⁵³⁰ As argued by the previously cited Bultema, however, the Protestant community in Türkiye had grown to such an extent that it could now stand on its own feet, both theologically and organisationally.⁵³¹

According to one source, there were two reasons why Protestants received more opposition from the Turkish authorities than all other Christian denominations. First, Protestants proclaimed the gospel more actively than other Christian movements. Second, the conversion of Turkish Muslims to Christianity evoked resentment from the Turkish authorities. The same source pointed out that the nature of repression of Protestants had changed. Twenty years ago, the repression had been physical in nature, and Protestants had been arrested. At the time of writing, Protestants were now more likely to encounter legal and bureaucratic opposition, according to the same source.⁵³²

⁵²⁴ ND, 'Als de groei zo doorzet, zijn er in Turkije in 2050 een miljoen protestanten', 4 September 2024. Reformatorisch Dagblad (RD), *Een politieagent bedacht de naam voor het snelgroeiende Turkse protestantisme*, 28 September 2024.

⁵²⁵ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁵²⁶ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 48 and 55–58. ND, 'Als de groei zo doorzet, zijn er in Turkije in 2050 een miljoen protestanten', 4 September 2024. RD, *Een politieagent bedacht de naam voor het snelgroeiende Turkse protestantisme*, 28 September 2024. Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), *A new report about Turkey's persecution of Protestant Christians*, 25 October 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁵²⁷ Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁵²⁸ Cengiz, *Religious minorities of Turkey*, published in 2020, pp. 77–79.

⁵²⁹ Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF International), *Türkiye's highest court rules in support of government's expulsion of nine foreign Christians for alleged 'missionary activities'*, 13 June 2024. RD, *Een politieagent bedacht de naam voor het snelgroeiende Turkse protestantisme*, 28 September 2024. HRWF, *A new report about Turkey's persecution of Protestant Christians*, 25 October 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁵³⁰ ADF International, *Türkiye's highest court rules in support of government's expulsion of nine foreign Christians for alleged 'missionary activities'*, 13 June 2024. Confidential source, 14 November 2024.

⁵³¹ RD, *Een politieagent bedacht de naam voor het snelgroeiende Turkse protestantisme*, 28 September 2024.

⁵³² Confidential source, 14 November 2024. Confidential source, 5 December 2024.

7 Women

7.1 Introduction

In Türkiye, men and women are equal before the law. As noted in the preceding COI Report, gender inequality to the detriment of women occurred in some areas, including public administration and the labour market.⁵³³ This situation remained unchanged during the reporting period.⁵³⁴ For example, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 35.5% of women⁵³⁵ were participating in the labour market in 2023. It should be noted that the percentage of working women in Türkiye during the period 1991–2023 has never been higher.⁵³⁶ A survey by a women’s organisation indicated that women fifty years of age and older were particularly likely to experience distance from the labour market. They encountered a combination of gender and age discrimination.⁵³⁷

In the field of education, women’s participation continued to increase. In March 2022, the percentage of female professors was more than 45%, and the percentage of female students was 49%.⁵³⁸ By February 2024, these percentages had risen to 46.4% and 51.7%, respectively. This marked the first time that there were more female than male students.⁵³⁹ By early February 2025, the percentage of female students had further increased to more than 53%.⁵⁴⁰

In the 2023 parliamentary elections, women were under-represented amongst the parliamentary candidates. The number of female MPs nevertheless rose from 103 to 121 (of 600 total seats).⁵⁴¹

Local elections in March 2024 (see 1.1.2) seemed to display a similar pattern. Female candidates were also under-represented in this case,⁵⁴² although the number of female representatives increased. In 11 out of 81 cities, a woman was elected mayor. In the 2019 local elections, four women had become mayors of cities.⁵⁴³

In a few cases, a female mayoral candidate achieved a first. For example, Sinem Dedetaş of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) became the first female mayor of Üsküdar, a district in Istanbul that was known as a conservative AKP stronghold.⁵⁴⁴ Sönük of DEM became the first female co-mayor of Batman, a city in south-eastern Türkiye. This city was known as a conservative stronghold of the Free Cause Party (HÜDA PAR), a conservative Islamist party appealing to Kurdish identity.⁵⁴⁵ In early

⁵³³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 59.

⁵³⁴ Confidential source, 14 February 2024.

⁵³⁵ The ILO is part of the UN and seeks social justice. Additional information on the ILO is available at <https://www.ilo.org>.

⁵³⁶ World Bank Group (WBG), *Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) – Türkiye*, undated, consulted on 6 September 2024.

⁵³⁷ Bianet, *Women over 50 in Turkey face gender, age-based discrimination in the workforce, report reveals*, 29 September 2024.

⁵³⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 59.

⁵³⁹ Daily Sabah, *Female students’ ratio in Turkish universities surges to 51.7%*, 14 February 2024.

⁵⁴⁰ HDN, *We won’t tolerate attacks on women’s rights: Erdoğan*, 5 February 2025.

⁵⁴¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 60.

⁵⁴² Duvar English, *‘Woman has no name’ on Turkish local election ballots*, 20 March 2024.

⁵⁴³ HDN, *Local polls see surge in number of women mayors*, 1 April 2024. Reuters, *Turkey gains new wave of female mayors after opposition’s poll success*, 3 April 2024. The Guardian, *Women have found their voice in Turkey, and given hope to others fighting for democracy across the globe*, 6 April 2024.

⁵⁴⁴ Duvar English, *CHP’s Dedetaş becomes Üsküdar’s first female mayor, ending decades of conservative rule*, 6 April 2024.

⁵⁴⁵ Duvar English, *DEM Party’s mayor lauds co-mayoral model as win for all women of Turkey*, 18 April 2024.

November 2024, however, Sönük was removed from her post and replaced by a pro-government trustee (see 5.4.3).⁵⁴⁶

In addition to education and politics, women also became more visible in the defence sector. In early August 2023, Gökçen Fırat was appointed as the first female admiral.⁵⁴⁷ In late August 2024, the first three female cadets graduated *cum laude* from the country's National Defence Academy.⁵⁴⁸

7.2 Violence against women

It is impossible to obtain a complete overview of the extent of gender-based violence in Türkiye. This is because, in general, women are reluctant to report violence for several reasons. They have little confidence in the actions of the authorities, fear that they will face further violence and/or lack sufficient legal knowledge and financial resources to initiate legal proceedings, which tend to be long and drawn out.⁵⁴⁹

During the preceding reporting periods, gender-based violence against women constituted a troubling problem.⁵⁵⁰ 'Femicide', or killing a woman because she is a woman, constitutes the most extreme form of violence against women.⁵⁵¹ Several actors monitor femicide in Türkiye, and available figures on the phenomenon vary.

The *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu* (We Will Stop Femicides Platform, KCDP) monitors and prioritises the issue of gender-based violence against women. This action group also provides legal assistance to victims of domestic violence.⁵⁵² According to the KCDP, 315 women were killed by men in 2023. In addition, 248 women died under suspicious circumstances in the same year.⁵⁵³ *Bianet*, an independent news platform that comprehensively addresses human rights issues, recorded the violent deaths of at least 333 women in 2023.⁵⁵⁴

In 2024, the number of femicides in Türkiye increased. According to the Human Rights Association (İHD) and the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye (TİHV), 344 femicides were committed in the first eleven months of 2024.⁵⁵⁵ The Turkish Federation of Women's Associations⁵⁵⁶ documented a total of 421 femicides in 2024.⁵⁵⁷ According to the KCDP, 394 women were killed by men in 2024. In addition, 259 women died under suspicious circumstances in the same year.⁵⁵⁸ *Bianet* registered at least 378 femicides in 2024.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁴⁶ Bianet, 'Trustee policies are degrading the ruling power, not the Kurdish movement', 7 November 2024.

⁵⁴⁷ HDN, *Turkish army appoints first female admiral*, 4 August 2023.

⁵⁴⁸ HDN, *Female students top military university graduates*, 1 September 2024.

⁵⁴⁹ Mor Çatı, *Report submitted to the Committee Against Torture*, 17 July 2024, no page number.

⁵⁵⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2021, pp. 56–58. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, pp. 55 and 56. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 63 and 64.

⁵⁵¹ Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, p. 27. De Volkskrant, *Eerwraak verdwijnt niet, de term wel*, 25 November 2024.

⁵⁵² Additional information on the KCDP is available at <https://www.kadincinayetleriniurdururacagiz.net/for-english>.

⁵⁵³ KCDP, *2023 annual report*, 10 January 2024, no page number.

⁵⁵⁴ Bianet, *Bianet male violence monitor video released*, 23 February 2024.

⁵⁵⁵ Artı Gerçek, *2024 yılında hak ihlali bilançosu... Hem içerde, hem dışarda* ('2024 overview human rights violations, both in prisons and on the streets'), 10 December 2024.

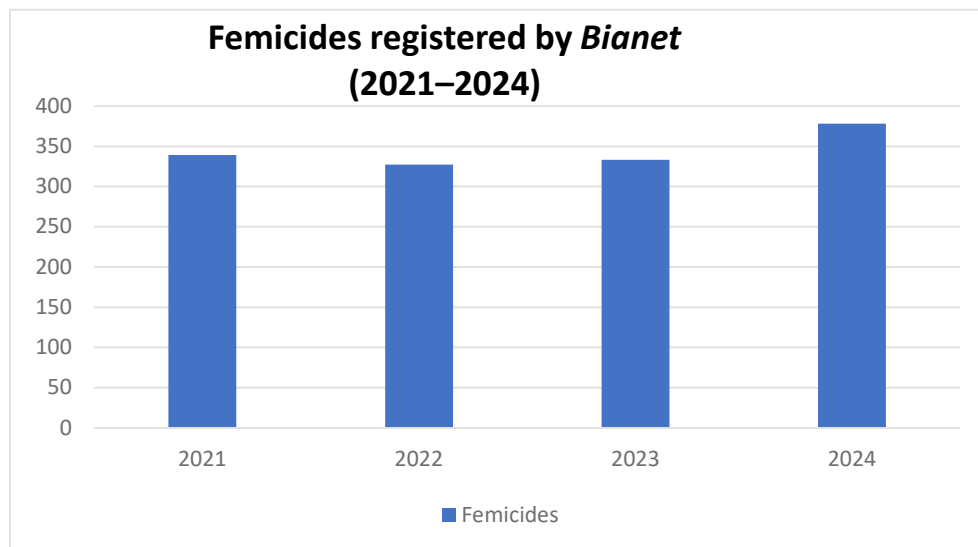
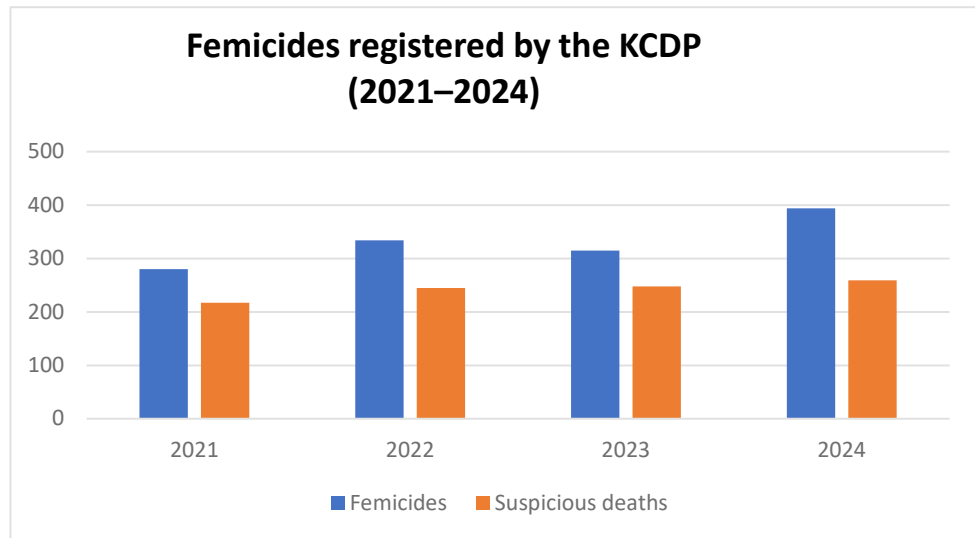
⁵⁵⁶ In Turkish, this federation is known as *Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu* (TKDF). Additional information about the TKDF is available at <https://tkdf.org.tr/sss?lang=en>.

⁵⁵⁷ Duvar English, *Women's federation criticizes Turkey's Family Year' initiative*, 8 January 2025.

⁵⁵⁸ KCDP, *2024 annual report*, 9 January 2025, no page number.

⁵⁵⁹ Bianet, *Bianet male violence video and infographic released*, 16 January 2025.

The numbers of femicides recorded by the KCDP and the media platform *Bianet* in recent years (2021–2024) are presented in the two graphs below.



The following femicides stood out during the reporting period. These examples are used solely for illustrative purposes. This should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list. On 27 February 2024, eight women were killed at different places in the country. Although the killings were unrelated, all had a gender dimension. In all cases, the woman had been killed by her male partner (or ex-partner).⁵⁶⁰

On 4 October 2024 in Istanbul, the nineteen-year-old Semih Çelik killed two women of the same age: İkbâl Uzunur and Ayşenur Halil. He slit Halil’s neck and decapitated Uzunur. He then took his own life by throwing himself off the city wall in Istanbul. In the days that followed, women’s rights organisations, including the KCDP, organised protests in Istanbul. They blamed the Turkish authorities for not providing adequate protection against gender-based violence. These protests spilled over to other cities: Ankara, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Eskişehir, Izmir and Mersin. Ali

⁵⁶⁰ Bianet, *Men killed eight women in 24 hours*, 28 February 2024. NOS, *Femicide in Turkije: in één dag acht vrouwen vermoord*, 28 February 2024.

Yerlikaya (Minister of the Interior) and Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş (Minister of Family and Social Services) condemned the killings and pledged to continue fighting against femicide.⁵⁶¹

On 4 October 2024, the same day that the two nineteen-year-old women were murdered, two men harassed a woman in an Istanbul nightlife area. Police detained both suspects, but they were released after giving statements at the police station. Shortly thereafter, surveillance footage of the street incident went viral on social media. This led to much public outcry, after which the authorities re-arrested the suspects, who had already been in contact with the justice system before. Women's rights activists lamented the fact that an incident had to go viral on social media before the authorities took adequate action against street harassment.⁵⁶²

On 15 October 2024, a violent incident took place at Koç University in Istanbul. At this private university, students protested against femicide. Some banners read *Jin, Jiyan, Azadî* ('Women, Life, Freedom'), a protest cry popularised by the Kurdish women's movement.⁵⁶³ Ultra-nationalist students responded to this by attacking the protesters. The students perceived the Kurdish slogan as an expression of 'terror propaganda' and struck out at the protesters.⁵⁶⁴ According to one source, the incident also took on a gender dimension, as the male attackers threatened to rape the female protesters. The same source pointed out that university security did not intervene and that the university administration did not investigate the incident. Some professors did express disapproval of the incident in a written statement, the source said.⁵⁶⁵

7.3 Legal protection for women

The Law to Protect the Family and Prevent Violence against Women (Law No. 6284), also known as 'Protective Law 6284', grants the police and courts the authority to employ both protective and preventive orders. Protective orders focus on ensuring the victim's safety. One example of a protective measure is the admission of a woman to a women's shelter (information on the women's refuge is presented in 7.5). In contrast, preventive measures are targeted at the perpetrator. A restraining order is an example of a preventive measure.⁵⁶⁶ A person who violates a restraining order three times should spend three days in jail.⁵⁶⁷

During the preceding reporting period, the implementation and enforcement of the existing legal remedies set out in Protective Law 6284 left much to be desired.⁵⁶⁸ This situation persisted into the reporting period.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶¹ Duvar English, *Turkish man dies by suicide after brutally murdering two women on same day, causes public outrage*, 4 October 2024. Duvar English, *Women in Turkey take to streets over brutal femicides*, 6 October 2024. HDN, *Brutal killings of women in Istanbul stir nationwide outrage*, 6 October 2024. Bianet, *'Femicides are political', Protests across Turkey after murders of two 19-year-old women*, 7 October 2024. RTL Nieuws, *Massaal protest in Turkije na moord op vrouwen: 'Te weinig actie tegen femicide'*, 12 October 2024. Euractiv, *Fresh protests in Turkey over violence against women*, 13 October 2024.

⁵⁶² Duvar English, *Turkish court arrests two men over sexual assault in public upon huge reactions*, 5 October 2024. Bianet, *'Femicides are political'*, 7 October 2024.

⁵⁶³ Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, pp. xii and 99. Bianet, *What is 'jin, jiyan, azadî'?*, published on 19 October 2024, updated on 20 October 2024.

⁵⁶⁴ Duvar English, *Fascist nationalist group attacks students protesting femicides at Istanbul's Koç University*, 15 October 2024.

⁵⁶⁵ Confidential source, 22 October 2024.

⁵⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 61.

⁵⁶⁷ Confidential source, 28 December 2024.

⁵⁶⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 62.

⁵⁶⁹ Confidential source, 14 February 2024. NOS, *In Turkije staat internationale vrouwendag in het teken van strijd tegen femicide*, 8 March 2024.

For example, the women's rights organisation *Mor Çatı* ('Purple Roof')⁵⁷⁰ documented several cases of women who had reported violence to the police or the public prosecutor's office but had not been taken seriously. They were discouraged from reporting or referred to women's organisations, even though these organisations had no mandate to act against violence. There were also instances in which police officers or prosecutors treated women in a sexist or misogynist manner. These officers and prosecutors were not held to account for this. *Mor Çatı* also reported on situations in which aggressive men had repeatedly and with impunity violated a restraining order. The same women's rights organisation observed that the duration of a restraining order was short, ranging from 24 hours up to a maximum of 6 months. As a result, women were constantly having to reapply for a restraining order. *Mor Çatı* also reported that the authorities had intervened appropriately in some cases.⁵⁷¹

One source indicated that the police had not standardised their approach to reports from women. As a result, police officers acted as they saw fit, dealing with reports in different ways. Police were more inclined to help women who bore traces of physical violence or who had suffered sexual violence. In contrast, victims of 'invisible' violence (such as online harassment, psychological violence and financial abuse) were taken less seriously, the source said.⁵⁷²

Figures from the KCDP pointed to the Turkish government's limited ability to protect women from femicide. In 2022, at least 23 women were killed who were in situations in which protective measures had been taken.⁵⁷³ According to the same platform, this number was 28 in 2023⁵⁷⁴ and, in 2024, it was 20.⁵⁷⁵

No straightforward answer can be given concerning whether women can settle with relatives elsewhere in the country to escape gender-based violence. As noted by one source, this remained highly situation-dependent. For example, if the perpetrator was a stalker, that person could also pose a danger to the family hosting the woman. The woman's own family could also be a problem for her. This was because, if she escaped to her family as a divorced woman, relatives could regard her as 'sexually available'. In this case, her 'honour' had to be protected, which in turn could lead to all sorts of restrictions. For example, it was common for a divorced woman's family to decide what clothes she should wear, that she should not work and under which circumstances she could leave the house.⁵⁷⁶

7.4 Repression of the women's movement

During the preceding reporting period, the women's movement faced repression from the Turkish state.⁵⁷⁷ This situation persisted during the reporting period. Nevertheless, the women's movement in Türkiye exhibited defiance and vitality.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁰ *Mor Çatı* ('Purple Roof') is based in Istanbul and operates its own shelter, focusing on the wishes and needs of the women who are sheltered there. Additional information on *Mor Çatı* is available at <https://en.morcati.org/tr>. Purple is the colour of feminism worldwide. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 57. Kisanak (ed.), *The purple color of Kurdish politics*, published in 2022, p. viii.

⁵⁷¹ *Mor Çatı, 2023, Activity report*, 28 May 2024, pp. 22, 25, 40, 43–46 and 48. *Mor Çatı, Report submitted to the Committee Against Torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*, 17 July 2024, no page number.

⁵⁷² Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁷³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 64.

⁵⁷⁴ KCDP, *2023 annual report*, 10 January 2024, no page number.

⁵⁷⁵ KCDP, *2024 annual report*, 9 January 2025, no page number.

⁵⁷⁶ Confidential source, 6 September 2024 and 13 February 2025.

⁵⁷⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 64.

⁵⁷⁸ Confidential source, 14 February 2024.

During the preceding reporting period, the public prosecutor in Istanbul opened a criminal case against the KCDP. The Turkish judiciary sought to disband this platform, accusing it of such offenses as 'undermining family structures' and 'immoral behaviour'.⁵⁷⁹ The KCDP was acquitted on 13 September 2023. The women's movement and its allies considered this acquittal a boost in the fight for gender equality.⁵⁸⁰

On 25 November 2023, women throughout the country demonstrated to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In Istanbul, riot police prevented protesters from entering Taksim Square. In contrast to the preceding reporting period, there were no arrests and police violence at the demonstration in Istanbul during the current reporting period.⁵⁸¹

The outlook seemed different in south-eastern Türkiye. In Diyarbakır, police arrested 3 women and, in Şırnak, they detained 21 women, including 3 journalists.⁵⁸² It remained unknown what happened to the three detainees in Diyarbakır. The three journalists in Şırnak were not criminally prosecuted, but their cameras and other equipment were rendered unusable. The remaining eighteen women were prosecuted for violation of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations. According to one source, they were all acquitted on 27 June 2024.⁵⁸³

On 8 March 2024, women and LGBTIQ+ protesters gathered in Istanbul in observance of International Women's Day. Once again, police prevented protesters from entering Taksim Square. In contrast to the preceding reporting period, no arrests were made in Istanbul this time.⁵⁸⁴

When asked, two sources explained why no arrests were made in Istanbul on 25 November 2023 and 8 March 2024. This was because the use of physical force was said to reflect negatively on Turkish authorities, especially so close to the local elections on 31 March 2024 (see 1.1.2). Both sources traced the fact that there was a tougher crackdown on women's rights activism in the south-east to the convergence of two grounds of discrimination. In the process, women were targeted both for their feminism and for their Kurdish consciousness.⁵⁸⁵

On 25 November 2024 hundreds of people once again took to the streets in Istanbul on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. They tried to reach Taksim Square and were stopped by police. The demonstration then moved to the pier in Karaköy. This time, the police arrested 169 protesters.⁵⁸⁶ According to one source, 162 women were released after giving statements at the police station. Five women were released on parole. Two women were found to have nationalities other than Turkish. They were transferred to a removal centre, the same source said.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁷⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 64 and 65.

⁵⁸⁰ Trouw, *Opluchting in Turkije: organisatie die strijdt tegen vrouwenmoord mag blijven*, 13 September 2023. Confidential source, 26 September 2023. Confidential source, 28 December 2024.

⁵⁸¹ Duvar English, *Protesters take streets in Turkey on International Day for Eliminating Violence Against Women*, 26 November 2023. Confidential source, 6 September 2024. Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁸² Duvar English, *Protesters take streets in Turkey on International Day for Eliminating Violence Against Women*, 26 November 2023. Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁸³ Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁸⁴ Bianet, *Women and LGBTI+s take to streets despite obstacles*, 8 March 2024. Confidential source, 6 September 2024. Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁸⁵ Confidential source, 6 September 2024. Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁸⁶ Bianet, *Nearly 200 detained as women attempt anti-violence protest in Istanbul*, 25 November 2024. Duvar English, *Turkish police detain 169 women during feminist march in Istanbul*, undated. The Independent, *Police in Turkey detains demonstrators seeking more protection for women against violence*, 25 November 2024.

⁵⁸⁷ Confidential source, 9 December 2024.

They turned out to be Ali Malikov and Parvin Alakbarov, two Azerbaijani LGBTIQ+ activists. During their arrest and detention, they were treated so badly by the police that they signed a 'voluntary' return form. Their hands remained cuffed to their backs for about ten hours, they were exposed to insults and cold, denied soap and clean clothes, and had to sleep on rotten mattresses. After signing, they were returned to Azerbaijan.⁵⁸⁸ It was unknown whether Malikov and Alakbarov had encountered problems with Azerbaijani authorities on their return.⁵⁸⁹

On 14 February 2025, feminists in Istanbul demonstrated against gender-based violence against women in connection with Valentine's Day. They also spoke out against hate killings of transgender people. The solidarity shown with the LGBTIQ+ community prompted the police to arrest dozens of women's rights activists. Overnight, they were released.⁵⁹⁰

The repression of the LGBTIQ+-rights movement in Türkiye is discussed in 8.2.

7.5 Women's shelters

During the preceding reporting period, Türkiye had a total of 149 shelters for women. The Ministry of Family and Social Services managed 112 shelters, municipalities 33, immigration authorities 3 and the women's rights organisation *Mor Çatı 1*.⁵⁹¹ According to one source, these numbers may no longer have been accurate, as the Turkish authorities had closed some shelters either temporarily or permanently.⁵⁹²

As indicated in the preceding COI Report, there were too few shelters for women in Türkiye, and the services of most shelters were deficient in several areas.⁵⁹³

This situation persisted during the reporting period. For example, *Mor Çatı* observed that there were long waiting times at shelters run by the authorities. There were also instances in which government shelters were full or staff discouraged women or turned away. Furthermore, the freedom of movement of women in government shelters was severely restricted, and they were not allowed to leave the shelter except for shopping, job applications and work. When staying in government shelters, women were under camera surveillance, were not allowed to use mobile phones and were searched. In addition, these shelters tended to lack recreational activities and specialised staff.⁵⁹⁴

In its annual report, *Mor Çatı* stated that it had accommodated 58 people in its own refuge centre by 2023. Thirty of these individuals were victims of physical violence.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁸⁸ Kaos GL, *LGBTIQ+ activists detained on November 25 face deportation!*, 26 November 2024. Minority Azerbaijan, *LGBTIQ+ activists detained on November 25 face the threat of deportation*, 26 November 2024. Open Caucasus Media (OC Media), *OC Media contributor and Azerbaijani queer activist faces extradition from Turkey*, 29 November 2024. Kaos GL, *From detention to ill-treatment in removal centers...*, 12 December 2024.

⁵⁸⁹ Confidential source, 9 January 2025.

⁵⁹⁰ Kaos GL, *Police detained feminists for 'LGBTIQ+ slogan' at Valentine's Day protest*, 15 February 2025.

⁵⁹¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 65.

⁵⁹² Confidential source, 6 September 2024.

⁵⁹³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 65.

⁵⁹⁴ *Mor Çatı, 2023, Activity report*, 28 May 2024, pp. 40, 42 and 55. *Mor Çatı, Report submitted to the Committee Against Torture*, 17 July 2024, no page number.

⁵⁹⁵ *Mor Çatı, 2023, Activity report*, 28 May 2024, pp. 54 and 56.

8 Sexual minorities (LGBTIQ+ people)

8.1 Introduction

Sexual intercourse between two people of the same gender is not a punishable offence in Türkiye. The preceding COI Report noted the poor social climate for LGBTIQ+ people in Türkiye. For example, the Turkish government expressed negative views on the LGBTIQ+ community. Sexual minorities also experienced antipathy and aggression from certain elements within society.⁵⁹⁶

The *LGBT Equality Index* ranks countries throughout the world in terms of the rights and freedoms of their LGBTIQ+ communities. This undated index also takes into account the laws and regulations pertaining to LGBTIQ+ individuals in each country, as well as the prevailing societal attitudes.⁵⁹⁷ At the time of writing, Türkiye was ranked 97th of the 197 total countries.⁵⁹⁸

The social climate for LGBTIQ+ people in Türkiye remained poor during the reporting period. Turkish authorities continued to speak negatively about the LGBTIQ+ community. For example, they described LGBTIQ+ people as a danger to Turkish society and the family. President Erdoğan stated several times that LGBTIQ+ people allegedly undermined family structures. He also traced the declining birth rate in Türkiye in part to the perceived social influence of LGBTIQ+ people. In addition, he described LGBTIQ+ people as a 'plague'.⁵⁹⁹

Turkish authorities also took a negative stance towards the LGBTIQ+ community in other ways. Several illustrative examples are discussed below. These are used solely for illustrative purposes and should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

In February 2024, the Turkish state broadcaster TRT proceeded to stream a documentary series entitled *True Colours*. In this series, the LGBTIQ+ movement was presented as a revenue model and Western export product. It was also linked to paedophilia.⁶⁰⁰

In April 2024, Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism withdrew its support for a film festival in Istanbul, as the festival was said to have shown some LGBTIQ+-related films.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 69 and 70.

⁵⁹⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 69.

⁵⁹⁸ Equaldex, *LGBT Equality Index, The most LGBT-friendly countries in the world*, undated, consulted on 4 September 2024.

⁵⁹⁹ Duvar English, *President Erdoğan says he does not 'recognize LGBT' at AKP congress*, 7 October 2023. Duvar English, *President Erdoğan targets LGBTI+ as 'biggest threat against Turkish family'*, 26 October 2023. NOS, *Erdogan zet aanval in op lhbt'ers, angst groeit in Turkse queergemeenschap*, 17 December 2023. Kaos GL, *2023 report*, 23 February 2024, pp. 3 and 6. Duvar English, *In new hate speech, Turkey's Erdoğan says 'imposition of LGBT' turns into 'tyranny,' surpassing 'even fascism'*, 5 June 2024. Confidential source, 2 September 2024. Kaos GL, *Population Policy Council convenes, LGBTI+s targeted again*, 10 January 2025. Duvar English, *Turkey's Year of Family, Religious Affairs Directorate targets LGBTI+ community in Friday sermon*, 11 January 2025. Kaos GL, *Religious Affairs Directorate targets LGBTI+ community in Friday sermon*, 13 January 2025. Kaos GL, *The 'Family Year' was introduced, LGBTI+s are targeted again: 'Desexualisation using LGBT as a battering ram...'*, 13 January 2025. Duvar English, *Erdoğan likens LGBTI+ community to a 'plague', vows to take 'measures' against*, 27 January 2025. Kaos GL, *Family Minister Göktaş targeted LGBTI+'s again*, 27 January 2025. Kaos GL, *President Erdoğan compared LGBTI+ people to 'plague'*, 27 January 2025. Kaos GL, *Erdoğan targeted LGBTI+s by saying 'perversion' at AKP Women's Branch congress*, 3 February 2025.

⁶⁰⁰ Duvar English, *Turkish state TV spends taxpayer money to spread anti-LGBTI+ propaganda*, 9 February 2024. AA, *True Colours, TRT's digital documentary series sheds light on LGBT lobby*, 10 February 2024.

⁶⁰¹ Duvar English, *Turkish Culture Ministry withdraws support from Istanbul Film Festival over anti-LGBTI+ smear campaign*, 22 April 2024.

In June 2024, a state university in northern Türkiye adapted the physicians' oath⁶⁰² for graduating medical students. The phrase, which stated that an acceding doctor would help patients regardless of their sexual orientation, was removed. The dean in charge considered this passage 'LGBT propaganda' and 'immoral' and drew a comparison with paedophilia.⁶⁰³

On 7 November 2024, authorities banned the screening of the film *Queer*, a drama about a gay love affair, at another film festival in Istanbul. In protest, organisers cancelled the entire film festival.⁶⁰⁴

On 23 January 2025, authorities banned the screening of a documentary entitled *Bellekvari* in Ankara. This documentary depicted the history of the *KuirFest*, an LGBTIQ+ festival held annually in Ankara.⁶⁰⁵

Interest groups

As stated in the preceding COI Report, the LGBTIQ+ rights movement in Türkiye exhibited resilience and was particularly visible and strongly organised in Istanbul and Ankara.⁶⁰⁶

This situation remained the same during the reporting period. Türkiye has fewer than fifteen registered LGBTIQ+ rights organisations,⁶⁰⁷ including Kaos GL⁶⁰⁸ and SPoD.⁶⁰⁹ These organisations monitor and report violations of LGBTIQ+ rights; conduct research on the situation of the LGBTIQ+ community; publish reports, books and brochures; and organise events (such as workshops and panel discussions) to promote LGBTIQ+ rights. They also provide consultation services to LGBTIQ+ individuals.⁶¹⁰

Those delving into the social situation of LGBTIQ+ people in Türkiye and how they experience the world they live in come across the term *lubunya*. This term has several meanings. Some LGBTIQ+ individuals in Türkiye use this term to refer to themselves. At the same time, however, *lubunya* can refer to the mutual solidarity experienced by LGBTIQ+ people in Türkiye. In addition, the LGBTIQ+ community in Türkiye has developed its own language of interaction known as *Lubunca*.⁶¹¹

During the preceding reporting period, LGBTIQ+ people in Türkiye were not alone in their pursuit of emancipation.⁶¹² Again in the current reporting period, they were able to count on the support of allies. For example, the provincial bar associations of Ankara, Diyarbakır, Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin were actively promoting the interests of LGBTIQ+ people. In addition, some professional groups, trade unions and women's rights organisations cooperated with the LGBTIQ+ rights movement. Furthermore, individual MPs from the Republican People's Party (CHP), DEM and the

⁶⁰² Also known as the 'Hippocratic Oath'.

⁶⁰³ Duvar English, *Dean of Turkish medical school removes 'sexual orientation' from Hippocratic Oath*, 23 June 2024.

⁶⁰⁴ The Guardian, *Turkish film festival scrapped over Daniel Craig gay drama censorship*, 7 November 2024. The Washington Post, *'Queer' movie ban in Turkey prompts film festival cancellation*, 7 November 2024. Bianet, *MUBI Fest censorship latest in a series of bans targeting LGBTI+s in Istanbul's Kadıköy*, 8 November 2024.

⁶⁰⁵ Bianet, *Ankara governor bans film screening during LGBTI+ festival*, 23 January 2025. Kaos GL, *13th Pink Life Queerfest's documentary screening at Mülkiyeliler banned by police*, 23 January 2025.

⁶⁰⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 70.

⁶⁰⁷ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁸ Additional information on Kaos GL is available at <https://kaosgl.org/en/>.

⁶⁰⁹ SPoD stands for *Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği*, which means 'Social Policy Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association'. Additional information on SPoD is available at <https://spod.org.tr/homepage/>.

⁶¹⁰ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶¹¹ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶¹² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 70.

Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) raised the issue of LGBTIQ+ rights violations in parliament.⁶¹³ Two sources noted that the aforementioned opposition parties did not have coherent policies towards LGBTIQ+ people.⁶¹⁴

As stated in the preceding COI Report, the social space for LGBTIQ+ people in Istanbul and Ankara was limited to certain districts and neighbourhoods, including Beşiktaş, Taksim and Kadıköy in Istanbul and Çankaya in Ankara.⁶¹⁵ According to one source, this situation remained the same during the reporting period.⁶¹⁶

Two sources highlighted that the social space for LGBTIQ+ people in the aforementioned neighbourhoods and districts was relative.⁶¹⁷ One source cited the following illustrative example in this regard. A demonstration against the ban on Pride Month took place in June 2024 (additional information on this ban is provided in 8.2). This protest was held in Bostancı, a neighbourhood in Istanbul that was known to be relatively 'safe' for the LGBTIQ+ community. To the protesters' surprise, however, they were besieged by a group of teenage boys and young men from the neighbourhood. The group snatched a rainbow flag from the protesters, threw it on the ground and stood on it. The protesters were forced to retreat into a building to prevent further escalation, the source said.⁶¹⁸ Additional information on aggression and antipathy from society against the LGBTIQ+ community is presented in 8.3.

8.2 Repression of the LGBTIQ+-rights movement

As stated in the preceding COI Report, the Turkish authorities took repressive action against LGBTIQ+-rights movement.⁶¹⁹ This situation remained the same in the current reporting period. The examples presented below should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

On 20 November 2023, the Izmir bar association posed in front of its office as part of the International Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR). In doing so, it unfurled the rainbow flag and called in a statement for a non-violent society and an end to hate crimes. Police removed the rainbow flag, whereupon a brief scuffle broke out between officers and lawyers. News reports did not mention any arrests.⁶²⁰

On the same day, trans activists undertook a protest march in Mersin, a southern Turkish city located on the Mediterranean Sea. Police arrested some protesters, but other protesters managed to free them again.⁶²¹

⁶¹³ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶¹⁴ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024.

⁶¹⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 70.

⁶¹⁶ Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶¹⁷ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024.

⁶¹⁸ Confidential source, 9 October 2024.

⁶¹⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 71–73.

⁶²⁰ Duvar English, *Turkish police intervene lawyers' protests for unfurling LGBTI+ flag*, 21 November 2023.

⁶²¹ Kaos GL, *Mersin'de 20 Kasım açıklamasına polis saldırısı ('Police intervention at demonstration on November 20 in Mersin')*, 20 November 2023.

Students at Istanbul University planned to undertake a protest march to mark International Women's Day on 8 March 2024. Police stopped them, however, as one of the banners contained the text 'LGBTIQ+'. According to reports, police arrested many students. It was not clear from the reporting how many students were involved and what happened to them next.⁶²² Additional information on the repression of the women's-rights movement is provided in 7.4.

During the preceding reporting period, police disrupted a Pride event on the campus of Middle East Technical University (METU)⁶²³ in Ankara.⁶²⁴ During the current reporting period, the Pride march on 31 May 2024 could take place at this location undisturbed.⁶²⁵ One source explained that this was not because of a tolerant attitude of the authorities towards the Pride demonstration on the university campus in Ankara. The organisers had simply outsmarted the police. The event was supposed to take place at 6:00pm, but was actually held at 12:00pm. According to the source, the police were not yet present at that time.⁶²⁶

On 23 June 2024, the LGBTIQ+ community in Istanbul celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Trans Pride March. Due to the heavy police presence, the protesters did not opt for a parade, but gathered at various locations to hang the pink-light blue-white trans flag.⁶²⁷ Police arrested two trans people.⁶²⁸ In doing so, they used the 'wrist lock' technique.⁶²⁹ Police detained the arrestees for eight hours. A lawsuit was filed against both individuals. The first hearing was scheduled for 28 January 2025.⁶³⁰

Since 2015, there has been a ban on Istanbul Pride. Turkish authorities also did not grant permission for the event in 2024. On 30 June 2024, protesters nevertheless gathered to demonstrate for LGBTIQ+ rights. Police acted repressively.⁶³¹ According to one source, they arrested eight adults and three minors in the process. Those arrested were held for nearly eight hours. At the time of writing, they had not been charged.⁶³²

On 14 July 2024, police broke up a Pride march in Antalya, a southern Turkish city on the Mediterranean Sea. They arrested four protesters in the process. Those arrested were released later that evening.⁶³³ The four were charged with organising,

⁶²² Gazete Duvar, *İstanbul Üniversitesi öğrencilerinin 8 Mart yürüyüşüne polis engeli: Çok sayıda öğrenci gözaltına alındı* ('Istanbul University students' March 8 march stopped by police: Many students arrested'), 7 March 2024.

⁶²³ In Turkish, this university is known as Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ).

⁶²⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 38 and 72.

⁶²⁵ Bianet, *METU students hold Pride Parade with no police interference*, 31 May 2024. Kaos GL, *12. ODTÜ Onur Yürüyüşü: 'Tüm baskı ve nefrete karşı yılmıyor, yaşayabileceğimiz bir devir için mücadelemizden asla vazgeçmiyoruz'* ('12th ODTÜ Pride March: "We will not give up against any form of oppression and hatred, and we will never give up the fight for our right to exist"'), 31 May 2024.

⁶²⁶ Confidential source, 23 September 2024.

⁶²⁷ The blue and pink stripes symbolise the traditional colours assigned to boys and girls, respectively. The white line represents people who do not identify as male or female, people in transition or people who are intersex. Het Parool, *'De transvlag moet zichtbaarder worden in Amsterdam'*, 16 August 2024.

⁶²⁸ Bianet, *İstanbul Trans Pride March marked with decentralized protests amid heavy police presence*, 24 June 2024.

⁶²⁹ A wrist lock is a form of a wrist clamp, in which a person's wrist is pushed backwards and thereby overstretched in an unnatural way.

⁶³⁰ Kaos GL, *Trans Onur Haftası Komitesi, 10. Trans Onur Yürüyüşü'nde gözaltına alınan 2 kişiye dava açıldığını duyurdu* ('The Trans Pride Week Commission announced that a lawsuit has been filed against two people who were taken into custody during the 10th Trans Pride March'), 22 August 2024.

⁶³¹ Bianet, *İstanbul's LGBTIQ+ activists hold Pride March in unexpected location to circumvent bans*, 1 July 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey detains at least 15 protesters at LGBTIQ+ pride march*, 1 July 2024.

⁶³² Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶³³ Duvar English, *Antalya police attack LGBTIQ+ Pride March, detain four*, 14 July 2024. Kaos GL, *Antalya Onur Yürüyüşü'ne polis saldırısı: 4 kişi gözaltına alındı!* ('Police crackdown in Antalya Pride March: 4 people have been taken into custody!'), 14 July 2024.

leading and participating in illegal meetings and demonstrations. The first hearing was scheduled for 10 April 2025.⁶³⁴

On 20 November 2024, trans activists tried to hand out *lokma* (a Turkish sweet) in Beşiktaş, an Istanbul district, in connection with the international TDoR. They did so in memory of transgender people who had died as a result of hate crimes. When the police heard about this, the activists had to show their identity cards and stop the action.⁶³⁵

8.3 Animosity and aggression from certain elements within society

As discussed in 8.1, LGBTIQ+ people experienced antipathy and aggression from certain elements within society. The examples provided below are used solely for illustrative purposes. This should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list. Additional information on hate crimes against transgender people is provided in 8.5.

During the preceding reporting period, people gathered in several cities as part of 'Great Family Meetings'.⁶³⁶ During these protest marches, organisers and participants called for protecting families, children and future generations from 'LGBT propaganda'.⁶³⁷ Another Great Family Meeting took place in Istanbul on 17 September 2023. Protesters at this event claimed to oppose 'LGBT propaganda' and 'socio-cultural terrorism'.⁶³⁸

Ahead of the Great Family Meeting in Istanbul, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) televised the video announcement for the meeting as a 'public service announcement'.⁶³⁹ LGBTIQ+ activists in Izmir took offence at this. They found that a government body had been guilty of spreading a hate message. On 12 September 2023, they went to the RTÜK regional office in Izmir to protest, but were intercepted by the police. In the process, police arrested ten activists.⁶⁴⁰ They were released on the same day. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether criminal proceedings would follow.⁶⁴¹

In September 2024, RTÜK again decided to broadcast the video announcement as a 'public service announcement' for the Great Family Meeting.⁶⁴² On 15 September 2024, hundreds of people took part in the event in Istanbul. This time, the LGBTIQ+ rights organisation SPoD organised a counter-action. In the process, they handed out sweets in memory of Ahmet Yıldız, a gay man who had died in 2008 as a result of a hate crime of a homophobic nature.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁴ Kaos GL, *Antalya Onur Yürüyüşüne dava açıldı, Megafon 'suç aleti' sayıldı* ('Lawsuit filed against Antalya Pride Parade, megaphone deemed "weapon"'), 19 August 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶³⁵ Bianet, *Police disrupt Transgender Day of Remembrance event in Istanbul*, 20 November 2024.

⁶³⁶ In Turkish, this event is known as the *Büyük Aile Buluşması*.

⁶³⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 73 and 74.

⁶³⁸ Duvar English, *Anti-LGBTI+ rally once again held in Istanbul with state support*, 18 September 2023.

⁶³⁹ Duvar English, *Turkey's media watchdog to support anti-LGBTI+ rally*, 6 September 2023.

⁶⁴⁰ Kaos GL, *Böyle bir yasak olamayacağını söylediğimiz için işkenceyle gözaltına alındık* ('We were assaulted and imprisoned because we said this kind of ban is impossible'), 12 September 2023.

⁶⁴¹ Duvar English, *Turkish police detain 10 activists in protest against media watchdog's support of anti-LGBTI+ rally*, 13 September 2023.

⁶⁴² Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶⁴³ Duvar English, *Turkish gov't uses public resources to promote anti-LGBTI+ hate rally*, 11 September 2024.

⁶⁴⁴ Bianet, *Activists stage counter-demonstration during anti-LGBTI+ rally in Istanbul*, 16 September 2024.

8.4 Legal protection for LGBTIQ+ people

Access to legal protection and resources proved limited for LGBTIQ+ people. In this regard, two sources pointed out that there were no specific references in Turkish laws and regulations to the protection of LGBTIQ+ rights.⁶⁴⁴

The findings of a study by the Turkish LGBTIQ+ rights organisation Kaos GL were consistent with this observation. Its investigation was based on a literature review and interviews with eight LGBTIQ+ individuals and eight lawyers who advocated for LGBTIQ+ rights.⁶⁴⁵ Kaos GL concluded that homophobia and transphobia were 'widespread' amongst police officers, judges, prosecutors, clerks and lawyers. The consequence was that, with some exceptions, LGBTIQ+ people were not considered citizens who were entitled to anything.⁶⁴⁶

The negative attitude towards LGBTIQ+ people in the legal system manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, Kaos GL recorded a case study of an LGBTIQ+ person who had tried to report an incident of homophobic violence to the police. The officer on duty did not bother to carefully record the statements of the person concerned, and an incomplete report was the result.⁶⁴⁷ In other cases, police refused to process reports from LGBTIQ+ people.⁶⁴⁸

Kaos GL also noticed that the judiciary was energetic in cases where the accused was LGBTIQ+, but slow in cases where an LGBTIQ+ person was the victim.⁶⁴⁹ This finding was not further quantified by Kaos GL. One source observed that courts granted restraining orders only if there was partner violence in cases involving heterosexual couples; no restraining orders were granted in cases involving same-sex couples.⁶⁵⁰

The result of these practices was that many LGBTIQ+ people had little or no confidence in the judicial process and experienced a barrier to turning to the Turkish authorities for protection. In that case, they feared facing discrimination once again, but this time by the authorities.⁶⁵¹

It should also be mentioned that government agencies – such as the Turkish Institute for Human Rights and Equality (TİHEK) and the Ombudsman Institution⁶⁵² – did not take up reports from LGBTIQ+ people.⁶⁵³ In a press statement, fifty LGBTIQ+-rights organisations agitated against this practice.⁶⁵⁴

It remained unclear whether LGBTIQ+ individuals were disproportionately or discriminatorily punished for committing a communal offence.⁶⁵⁵ Under Article 29 of the Turkish Penal Code, perpetrators of violence may be eligible for sentence

⁶⁴⁴ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 9 October 2024.

⁶⁴⁵ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁶ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, pp. 4 and 9.

⁶⁴⁷ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, p. 10.

⁶⁴⁸ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, pp. 13 and 18.

⁶⁴⁹ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, pp. 8 and 15.

⁶⁵⁰ Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶⁵¹ Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, pp. 9, 10, 13, 15 and 18. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶⁵² In Turkish, this institute is known as *Kamu Denetçiliği Kurumu* (KDK). Additional information is available at <https://english.ombudsman.gov.tr>.

⁶⁵³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 42. Kaos GL, *Access to justice for LGBTI+ persons*, 1 November 2023, p. 14. Kaos GL, *2023 report*, 23 February 2024, pp. 3, 7 and 11. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 19 November 2024. Kaos GL, *DEM Party MP Özgül Saki*, 29 November 2024. Kaos GL, *TİHEK continued its discriminatory attitude towards LGBTI+'s in the Parliament*, 15 January 2025.

⁶⁵⁴ Kaos GL, *TİHEK continued its discriminatory attitude towards LGBTI+'s in the Parliament*, 15 January 2025.

⁶⁵⁵ Confidential source, 27 September 2024.

reductions if they have been incited to violence through an 'unjust provocation'.⁶⁵⁶ Given that this concept was not specified, it regularly occurred that perpetrators of gay or transphobic hate crimes and femicides were granted reduced sentences because they had allegedly been 'provoked' by the victim.⁶⁵⁸ Additional information on femicides is provided in 7.2.

8.5 Situation of transgender people

As noted in the preceding COI Report, transgender people were targeted for discrimination, exclusion and aggression. Transphobia could take a variety of forms. For example, transgender people had less access to the labour market, healthcare and the housing market.⁶⁵⁹ This situation persisted during the reporting period.⁶⁶⁰

For example, in July 2024, *Bianet* (an independent news platform that deals extensively with human rights issues) reported that transgender people had less access to affordable rental housing. Landlords charged transgender people higher rents or refused to enter into leases with transgender people. Securing rental housing proved particularly difficult for trans women. This is because many landlords were convinced that every trans woman would earn a living as a sex worker. It was also common for landlords or neighbours to harass and bully transgender people away from their rental properties. Rarely did transgender people initiate legal proceedings, as they had little confidence in the judicial process. Transgender people could not move in with their families in all cases, as some relatives also adopted a transphobic stance. As a result, some transgender people became homeless. They were forced to survive on the streets or in parks.⁶⁶¹

In the same month, *Bianet* documented the experiences of a trans woman in Izmir. She had been repeatedly attacked by her neighbours, both verbally and physically. In addition, the neighbours, who were responsible for managing the apartment building, had cut her off from water and electricity. The trans woman reported the violence and harassment to the police, and a restraining order was imposed on her neighbours. Nevertheless, the trans woman was forced to move elsewhere in Izmir.⁶⁶²

Hate crimes of a transphobic nature took place during the reporting period.⁶⁶³ This is illustrated by the examples shown below. They should not be regarded as exhaustive.

On 10 April 2024, a trans woman was attacked on Bornova street, a street in Izmir where many trans women live. A man suffered an epileptic seizure on this street. Several trans women went to him to offer help. However, a group of young men were under the impression that the epileptic man had been attacked by the trans women. In response, the men attacked the trans women. In doing so, they threw stones, bottles and sticks. The men managed to grab one trans woman and beat her. They also robbed the trans woman of her phone and wallet. Police investigated the incident and arrested six suspects. At the time of writing, these individuals had

⁶⁵⁶ In Turkish, *haksız tahrik*.

⁶⁵⁷ Venice Commission, *Penal Code of Turkey*, 15 February 2016, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁸ Confidential source, 23 September 2024. Confidential source, 1 November 2024.

⁶⁵⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 74.

⁶⁶⁰ *Bianet*, *LGBTI+ organizations, Transphobia is a crime*, 20 November 2023.

⁶⁶¹ *Bianet*, *Trans people in Turkey face housing crisis more intensely amid discrimination and phobia*, published on 9 July 2024, updated on 10 July 2024.

⁶⁶² *Bianet*, *Trans woman in Izmir forced to relocate after persistent harassment from neighbors*, 23 July 2024.

⁶⁶³ *Bianet*, *Transphobic attacks are increasing in Turkey's Izmir, as is solidarity*, 19 July 2024. Kaos GL, *Transphobic attacks do not stop in Izmir*, 20 January 2025.

been released.⁶⁶⁴ However, it remained unclear whether the perpetrators of violence were criminally prosecuted.⁶⁶⁵

On 13 July 2024, a trans woman was stabbed by a man in her home in Izmir. He stabbed her nearly fifty times. The trans woman ended up in hospital in critical condition. Police caught the perpetrator.⁶⁶⁶ At the time of writing, it was unclear how the trans woman was doing and whether the perpetrator was facing criminal charges.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁴ Duvar English, *Trans women assisting man with seizure, get assaulted, robbed, and stones hurled at their homes in İzmir, Turkey*, 12 April 2024. Kaos GL, *'Everyone on Bornova Street are on their toes'*, 17 April 2024.

⁶⁶⁵ Confidential source, 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

⁶⁶⁶ Kaos GL, *Hate attack in İzmir, 'The attacker was caught thanks to trans women who heard E.Ş.'s cry for help'*, 16 July 2024.

⁶⁶⁷ Confidential source, 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 13 November 2024.

9 Compulsory military service

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the situation of draft evaders, deserters and conscientious objectors in Türkiye. First, these three terms are explained. A 'draft evader' is a conscript who does not respond to the summons to report for compulsory military service. A draft evader has thus never actually served. A 'deserter' was already serving as a conscript or professional soldier, but subsequently left the army in an unauthorised manner (in other words, without the permission of the military authorities).⁶⁶⁸ In Türkiye, soldiers cannot be considered deserters until they have been absent without leave for a period of at least six days.⁶⁶⁹ A 'conscientious objector' has serious, insurmountable conscientious objections to serving in an army. For example, these conscientious objections may be ideological or religious in nature.⁶⁷⁰

As far as is known, no legal changes have taken place regarding compulsory military service since August 2023.⁶⁷¹ In Türkiye, men are subject to compulsory military service, but women are not.⁶⁷² Women can serve voluntarily in the Turkish armed forces. There are opportunities to be exempted from compulsory national service (for example, due to medical reasons). A person's compulsory national service may be deferred by virtue of pursuing university studies.⁶⁷³

Türkiye does not recognise the right to conscientious objection, nor does it offer an alternative form of compulsory national service. Conscientious objectors are therefore regarded as draft evaders or deserters, and they are treated as such (additional information on this point is presented in 9.2).⁶⁷⁴ It is not known how many conscientious objectors there are in Türkiye.⁶⁷⁵

Conscripts can buy off their compulsory national service by formal means. In such cases, conscripts are required to complete only one month of military basic training. This practice is known as paid conscription service.⁶⁷⁶ During this one-month shortened compulsory national service, the conscript is required to participate in the routines of being a soldier, including wearing a military uniform, following orders, marching and target practice.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁶⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 67. Home Office, *Country police and information note, Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, p. 56.

⁶⁶⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 67. Confidential source, 2 October 2024.

⁶⁷⁰ Home Office, *Country police and information note, Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 45 and 56.

⁶⁷¹ Confidential source, 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 1 October 2024.

⁶⁷² Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, p. 19. The Guardian, 'You can't fight your way to peace', *From a 20-year-old Israeli to a 99-year Briton, Eight conscientious objectors on why they refused to serve in the army*, 8 June 2024.

⁶⁷³ Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 8, 19, 21, 22 and 57.

⁶⁷⁴ Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 15, 47-49, 52, 58 and 59. Confidential source, 18 September 2024.

⁶⁷⁵ Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 15 and 46. The Guardian, 'You can't fight your way to peace', 8 June 2024.

⁶⁷⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 77. Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 8, 25 and 26. Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁶⁷⁷ Confidential source, 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 1 October 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

The amount of the payment is adjusted every six months. For the period July-December 2024, the payment amount was 217,871.04 Turkish lira.⁶⁷⁸ Deserters wishing to use the paid conscription option had to pay an additional fine of 3,177.29 Turkish lira⁶⁷⁹ for each month of desertion.⁶⁸⁰

9.2 Situation of draft evaders and deserters

As indicated in the two preceding COI Reports, draft evaders and deserters were restricted in their freedom of movement, fined and denied access to various government products and services.⁶⁸¹ This situation remained the same during the reporting period.

Under Article 26 (1) of the Law on Conscription (in Turkish, *Askeralma Kanunu*), draft evaders and deserters are reported to the Turkish Ministry of the Interior. Their status regarding compulsory military service is set out in the *Genel Bilgi Toplama Sistemi* (General Information Gathering System, GBT), a database of legal authorities and the security apparatus. As a result of this registration in the GBT, draft evaders and deserters are at risk of being detained at passport control or during routine identity checks on the street or public transport. Given that hotels are required by law to forward the personal data of their guests to the local police, draft evaders and deserters face a similar risk when checking into a hotel.⁶⁸²

Once draft evaders or deserters are caught during a check, they are transported by the authorities to the nearest police station or recruitment office. There, they are issued what is known as a *tutanak* ('report'). They are then released with a notice that they must report for compulsory national service within fifteen days. Based on the aforementioned report, draft evaders and deserters may face criminal investigations, criminal cases and fines.⁶⁸³ This course of action can be repeated endlessly. According to one source, some draft evaders and deserters choose not to travel in order to avoid such proceedings.⁶⁸⁴

Draft evaders and deserters have the right to object to a fine, but this procedure is not known to everyone. One source noted that some people do not know how to file an objection.⁶⁸⁵ Conscientious objectors who refuse on principle to pay imposed fines cannot have bank accounts; otherwise, the money in their accounts will be confiscated.⁶⁸⁶

In October 2024, the story emerged of a conscientious objector who had been experiencing problems with the Turkish authorities since 2010. At the time of writing, fourteen criminal cases were pending against him. In addition, fines had reached a total of 36,500 Turkish lira.⁶⁸⁷ The conscientious objector was constantly

⁶⁷⁸ According to CoinMill.com, an online exchange rate converter, 217,871.04 Turkish lira was equivalent to 9,290.63 euros on 2 October 2024.

⁶⁷⁹ According to CoinMill.com, an online exchange rate converter, 3,177.29 Turkish lira was equivalent to 135.49 euros on 2 October 2024.

⁶⁸⁰ Turks Ministerie van Defensie, *01 Temmuz – 31 Aralık 2024 Tarih Aralığını Kapsayan Bedelli Askerlik Müracaat Duyurusu* ('Call for application for buying off compulsory national service between 1 July and 31 December 2024'), 8 July 2024.

⁶⁸¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, pp. 68 and 69. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, pp. 77 and 78.

⁶⁸² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 68. Confidential source, 18 and 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

⁶⁸³ Confidential source, 18 and 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 3 October 2024.

⁶⁸⁴ Confidential source, 18 and 27 September 2024.

⁶⁸⁵ Confidential source, 27 September 2024.

⁶⁸⁶ The Guardian, 'You can't fight your way to peace', 8 June 2024.

⁶⁸⁷ According to CoinMill.com, an online exchange rate converter, 36,500 Turkish lira was equivalent to 1,569.19 euros on 22 October 2024.

having to answer to the police, gendarmerie and prosecutors. Any time he passed a checkpoint or checked into a hotel, he came into contact with the police. In his own words, the conscientious objector thus remained trapped in a continuous cycle of criminal investigations, criminal cases and fines.⁶⁸⁸

9.3 Kurdish conscripts

Conscripts are distributed randomly across Türkiye.⁶⁸⁹ Kurdish conscripts can therefore not rule out the possibility of being stationed in south-eastern Türkiye.⁶⁹⁰ In principle, conscripts are not deployed in conflict zones such as northern Iraq and Syria, where Turkish forces are active. In principle, they are also not deployed in anti-terror operations and in high-risk areas along the Turkish-Iraqi border, where skirmishes may take place between Turkish forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).⁶⁹¹ Additional information on the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK on Turkish territory is presented in 1.3.2.

During the reporting period, no information was available on anti-Kurdish violence against Kurdish conscripts, any deployment of Kurdish conscripts against the PKK in south-eastern Türkiye and conscientious objectors who were disproportionately punished because of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation or sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).⁶⁹²

9.4 Freedom of movement for conscripts

Conscripts are entitled to a number of leave days during their period of service. As far as is known, conscripts can move freely throughout the country during their leave, provided they have received permission.⁶⁹³

Conscripts may legally travel out of Türkiye, provided they have received permission. Conscripts may visit abroad on several grounds. The following are a few examples:

- Visiting a parent or parent-in-law, spouse, child, brother or sister abroad;
- Supporting a sick relative abroad;
- Having a permanent residence permit abroad;
- Having legal, commercial or educational links with foreign countries;
- Undergoing medical treatment abroad at their own expense.⁶⁹⁴

According to one source, deserters are subject to a travel ban, as desertion is considered a serious crime. Consequently, they cannot legally exit Türkiye.⁶⁹⁵ Additional information on travel bans is provided in 3.6.

⁶⁸⁸ Duvar English, *Conscientious objector faces vicious cycle of investigations in Turkey*, 17 October 2024.

⁶⁸⁹ Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, p. 58.

⁶⁹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 78.

⁶⁹¹ Home Office, *Turkey, Military service*, October 2023, pp. 8, 21 and 57.

⁶⁹² Confidential source, 27 September 2024. Confidential source, 1 October 2024.

⁶⁹³ Confidential source, 2 October 2024. Confidential source, 10 October 2024.

⁶⁹⁴ Confidential source, 2 October 2024.

⁶⁹⁵ Confidential source, 1 October 2024.

10 Irregular migrants, asylum seekers and asylum status holders

10.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the situation of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and asylum status holders in Türkiye. The laws and regulations regarding asylum and protection in Türkiye are discussed in 10.2. The remaining sections address the various migrant communities: Afghans (10.3), Iranians (10.4), Uyghurs (10.5), Palestinians (10.6) and Syrians (10.7).

10.2 Legal framework

The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LoFIP), also known as Law No. 6458, regulates asylum and migration flows in Türkiye. This law defines four types of protection:

- Refugee status, as referred to in the Refugee Convention adopted by the United Nations in 1951;
- Conditional protection;⁶⁹⁶
- Subsidiary protection;⁶⁹⁷
- Temporary protection (TP).⁶⁹⁸

In Türkiye, refugee status, as referred to in the Refugee Convention can be granted only to nationals of member states of the Council of Europe (CoE).

Non-European asylum seekers facing persecution within the meaning of any of the Convention's⁶⁹⁹ provisions may qualify for conditional protection.

Non-European asylum seekers who would face a foreseeable risk of serious harm upon returning to their home country may qualify for subsidiary protection.

A separate category of protection – TP – has been designed for Syrians and stateless persons from Syria. Due to the sheer numbers of Syrians fleeing to Türkiye as a result of the civil war in Syria, their asylum requests could not be individually evaluated under the frameworks for conditional and subsidiary protection. As a result, they may be eligible for TP status.⁷⁰⁰

The Presidency of Migration Management (PMM)⁷⁰¹ is charged with implementing the LoFIP. The PMM falls under the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁶ In Turkish, *Şartlı mülteci*.

⁶⁹⁷ In Turkish, *İkincil Koruma*. Also known as 'secondary protection'.

⁶⁹⁸ In Turkish, *Geçici Koruma*.

⁶⁹⁹ These provisions of the Convention concern the following: race, religion, nationality or belonging to a given social group or political persuasion.

⁷⁰⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 79. Bülbül, Hasan Basri, 'Recognising Palestinian refugees, Applicability of Article 1D of the 1951 Refugee Convention in Turkey', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 24 August 2024, pp. 280, 281, 285 and 287. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024. UNHCR, *Temporary protection in Türkiye*, undated, consulted on 22 December 2024.

⁷⁰¹ In Turkish, the PMM is known as *Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı*. Additional information on the PMM is available at <https://en.goc.gov.tr/#>.

⁷⁰² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 79 and 80. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

During the preceding reporting period, Turkish authorities announced the 'Dilution Plan' (in Turkish, *seyreltme planı*). This policy specified that the population of a neighbourhood could consist of no more than twenty percent foreigners. As a result, in July 2023, the registration of foreigners was stopped in 1,169 neighbourhoods where the twenty-percent quota had already been reached.⁷⁰³ According to one source, this number had risen to 1,400 by the time of writing.⁷⁰⁴ Individuals who were not registered with the authorities were at risk of deportation to the country of origin (additional information on this point is provided in 10.3 and 10.7.4).

The sources consulted were not under the impression that the Dilution Plan was being implemented in a structured manner. On the one hand, the registration of foreigners was stopped in an increased number of districts. On the other hand, the authorities took no action to bring the percentage of foreigners in neighbourhoods where it had previously exceeded twenty percent below the set standard.⁷⁰⁵

One source pointed out that, in some cases, a neighbourhood could change its registration status. The neighbourhood would then be 'open' for the registration of foreigners, and then 'closed' again. On rare occasions, Turkish authorities have allowed foreigners to settle in 'closed' neighbourhoods. For example, one source was aware of an Iranian trans woman who was initially residing in the eastern Turkish city of Erzurum. There, she had been exposed to gender-based violence. In response, the PMM decided that she could settle in Istanbul, a city that was 'closed' to the registration of new foreigners.⁷⁰⁶

One policy development that stood out during the reporting period was the emergence of 'mobile checkpoints'.⁷⁰⁷ These were vans used by the Turkish Ministry of the Interior. Government officials in these vans inspected the papers of foreigners at busy places (for example, squares and metro and bus stations). This was intended to curb irregular migration.⁷⁰⁸ According to Turkish Interior Minister Yerlikaya, there were 270 mobile checkpoints across the country as of early December 2024.⁷⁰⁹

Foreigners who were not registered or who were at the checkpoint without a travel permit could be transferred to a police station, deportation centre or Temporary Accommodation Centre (TAC),⁷¹⁰ as described in further detail in 10.7.1. The follow-up steps that were taken were highly dependent on the case and the actions of the individual government employee.⁷¹¹

At the time of writing, the Turkish authorities were relaxing regulations regarding work permits for Syrian TP status holders. This relaxation was intended to promote the participation of Syrians in the formal labour market in Türkiye. The exact content of the relaxation and its implementation in practice were still unclear.⁷¹²

⁷⁰³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 80.

⁷⁰⁴ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁷⁰⁵ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁰⁶ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁰⁷ Also known as 'mobile migration (point) vehicles'.

⁷⁰⁸ NRC, *Mishandeld in een Turks uitzetcentrum, 'Dit project is gefinancierd door de EU'*, 11 October 2024.

Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁰⁹ Türkiye Today, *47 human smuggling suspects, 904 irregular migrants detained in Türkiye*, 7 December 2024.

⁷¹⁰ Only Syrians were settled in TACs.

⁷¹¹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷¹² Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 and 16 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

10.3 Afghans

As observed in preceding reporting periods, since the Taliban had seized state power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Turkish authorities were no longer processing asylum applications from newly arrived Afghans. They erected a wall at the border with Iran. Some Afghans managed to get over this border wall. Those detained after arriving in Türkiye were forcibly transferred across the Turkish-Iranian border.⁷¹³

The situation described above remained the same during the reporting period. Turkish authorities continued to work on the border wall and equipped it with sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment.⁷¹⁴

Turkish authorities were generally unwilling to accept asylum requests from Afghans. Young Afghan men were particularly unlikely to qualify for international protection. In other cases, however, families with women and children were rejected as well.⁷¹⁵

During the reporting period, Afghans were subjected to forced deportations. In November 2024, the Turkish authorities announced that the security apparatus had 'prevented' the entry of 15,422 irregular migrants at the Turkish-Iranian border.⁷¹⁶ From this, sources concluded that these individuals had been intercepted and forcibly transferred across the Turkish-Iranian border.⁷¹⁷

Another source stated that almost all Afghans intercepted by Turkish authorities after crossing the Iranian-Turkish border were subjected to pushbacks. According to this source, pushbacks at the border with Iran took place in a 'systematic' manner.⁷¹⁸

Two sources stated that planes were taking deported Afghans back from Türkiye to Afghanistan on a regular basis.⁷¹⁹ In this regard, one source referred to three to four flights a week. Several hundred to several thousand Afghans were reportedly flown back to Afghanistan each week. These flights were operated by the airline Ariana Afghan Airlines.⁷²⁰ According to an employee of Ariana Airlines, the airline had flown more than a hundred thousand deported Afghans from Türkiye to Afghanistan since 2021.⁷²¹

Given the above, many Afghans did not bother to report to Turkish authorities after arriving in Türkiye. They regarded Türkiye as a transit country. During their illegal stay in the country, they tried to earn enough money to pay for the trip to Europe.⁷²²

⁷¹³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 88.

⁷¹⁴ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye guards Iran border with high-tech to curb illegal activities*, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 December 2024. Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

Daily Sabah, *Turkish troops brave cold for border protection in country's east*, 29 December 2024.

⁷¹⁵ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷¹⁶ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye guards Iran border with high-tech to curb illegal activities*, 12 November 2024

⁷¹⁷ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷¹⁸ Confidential source, 18 December 2024.

⁷¹⁹ Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷²⁰ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷²¹ POLITICO, *The EU is helping Turkey forcibly deport migrants to Syria and Afghanistan*, 11 October 2024.

⁷²² Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

10.4 Iranians

The preceding COI Report recounted the situation of two Iranians who were covered by international protection in Türkiye. They were in danger of being deported. The Turkish authorities eventually released them.⁷²³

During the reporting period, some Iranians also got into trouble with the Turkish authorities. The examples provided below are used solely for illustrative purposes. This should in no way be regarded as an exhaustive list.

Political activist Shahryar Baratinya had illegally crossed the Iranian-Turkish border. Turkish authorities detained him, and he was found not to have lawful residence in Türkiye. On 3 August 2023, Türkiye extradited Baratinya to the Iranian authorities.⁷²⁴ Upon his return, Iran incarcerated him in the Evin prison in the Iranian capital Tehran.⁷²⁵

On 23 November 2023, Turkish authorities in Istanbul arrested an Iranian actress, Shailin Asadollahi, and took her to a removal centre. She had been staying in Türkiye in connection with a study programme. Asadollahi identified the reason for her threatened deportation as a complaint someone had filed against her.⁷²⁶ On 25 November 2023, the media outlet JINHA reported that Asadollahi had been released.⁷²⁷

10.5 Uyghurs

10.5.1 Introduction

The Uyghurs have traditionally lived in Xinjiang, a region in north-western China. They speak a Turkic language, and the overwhelming majority adhere to Islam. Identity-conscious and activist Uyghurs refer to the region as 'East Turkestan' (in Turkish, *Doğu Türkistan*).⁷²⁸

Türkiye has historical, linguistic and religious ties to the Uyghurs, and it has long been home to a sizeable Uyghur diaspora.⁷²⁹ One source estimated the Uyghur community in Türkiye as comprising 50,000 to 55,000 people.⁷³⁰

10.5.2 Grounds for residence and Turkish nationality

As stated in the General Country of Origin Information Report on China from December 2022,⁷³¹ Uyghurs in Türkiye could apply for a permanent residence permit or visa on humanitarian grounds.⁷³² This situation remained unchanged during the reporting period. Depending on the situation, Uyghurs were eligible for a permanent residence permit or a visa on humanitarian grounds. The visa had to be

⁷²³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 72.

⁷²⁴ Iran Wire, *Türkiye departs political activist Shahryar Baratinya to Iran*, 4 August 2023.

⁷²⁵ Iran Wire, *Iranian political activist trapped in legal limbo*, 23 September 2024.

⁷²⁶ Bianet, *Iranian actor Shailin Asadollahi detained in Turkey*, 24 November 2023.

⁷²⁷ JINHA, *Iranian actor Shailin Asadollahi released*, 25 November 2023.

⁷²⁸ *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, pp. 75 and 76.

⁷²⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 90.

⁷³⁰ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷³¹ Previously, the situation of Uyghurs in Türkiye was addressed in the General Country of Origin Information Report on China.

⁷³² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 90.

renewed every six months.⁷³³ The sources consulted did not clarify the cases in which a permanent residence permit was granted and under what circumstances a visa on humanitarian grounds was issued.

According to one source, about ten thousand Uyghurs were staying in Türkiye indefinitely, and about three thousand Uyghurs had visas on humanitarian grounds. The same source indicated that about a thousand Uyghurs were leading an undocumented existence in Türkiye. They could not work for pay or send their children to school. This undocumented group depended on charity.⁷³⁴ Another source reported being aware of Uyghurs residing in Türkiye under a study visa.⁷³⁵

As stated in the General Country of Origin Information Report on China from December 2022, Uyghurs could apply for and obtain Turkish citizenship through an expedited procedure known as 'acquisition of Turkish citizenship through extraordinary means' (in Turkish, *İstisnai Olarak Türk Vatandaşlığının Kazanılması*).⁷³⁶ This arrangement, which was based on the ethno-linguistic kinship between Turks and Uyghurs, remained in force during the reporting period. In addition to Uyghurs, other Turkic peoples (for example, Crimean Tatars)⁷³⁷ could also take advantage of this arrangement. One source estimated that about four thousand Uyghurs had obtained Turkish citizenship as of December 2022. Requests for naturalisation were pending for five to six thousand Uyghurs, according to the same source.⁷³⁸

10.5.3 Geopolitical dynamics

In 2017, China and Türkiye signed an extradition treaty. China ratified the treaty in late December 2020.⁷³⁹ At the time of writing, Türkiye had not ratified the extradition treaty.⁷⁴⁰

As far as is known, Türkiye did not extradite any Uyghurs to China during the reporting period, either directly or indirectly.⁷⁴¹ One Uyghur, Ilyas Ablikim, was in danger of being extradited to China. He had been living in Istanbul since 2014, had a permanent residence permit and had applied for Turkish citizenship. On 10 November 2023, police arrested him and, after a few days, he was transferred to a removal centre in Kayseri.⁷⁴² As far as could be ascertained, he had not been deported to China at the time of writing. According to one source, Ablikim was probably still staying in a removal centre. Seven to eight other Uyghurs met with the same fate. They were all suspected of having ties to the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP),⁷⁴³ the same source noted.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³³ University of Sheffield, 'We know you better than you know yourself', *China's transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora*, 13 April 2023, p. 53. Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷³⁴ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷³⁵ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷³⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 90.

⁷³⁷ Crimean Tatars have traditionally inhabited Crimea and speak a Turkic language. In 2014, Russia annexed this peninsula at the expense of Ukraine.

⁷³⁸ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷³⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 91.

⁷⁴⁰ Heinrich Böll Stiftung, *The Uyghur issue in Turkey-China relations*, 5 April 2024. Confidential source, 11 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁴¹ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷⁴² Qha, *Türk vatandaşlığına başvuran Uygur Türkü Ablikim, Çin'e iade mi edilecek? ('Will Ablikim, the Uyghur Turk who applied for Turkish citizenship, be extradited to China?')*, 17 November 2023.

⁷⁴³ The TIP is a Uyghur movement of jihadist persuasion.

⁷⁴⁴ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

Chinese authorities were active on Turkish soil to gather information about the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye. They did this through a network of informants.⁷⁴⁵ On 20 February 2024, Turkish authorities arrested six Chinese nationals. They had allegedly been spying on the Uyghur community in Türkiye at the behest of China. Uyghur advocacy organisations welcomed their arrest and expressed hope that the Turkish government would further counter the Chinese surveillance of Uyghurs in Türkiye.⁷⁴⁶

As stated in the General Country of Origin Information Report on China from December 2022, applications by Uyghurs for Turkish citizenship were rejected if the applicant was actively and visibly committed to the Uyghur cause.⁷⁴⁷

This dynamic remained present during the reporting period. In some cases, rejected applicants were told that they would pose a threat to the country's national security; in other cases, Turkish authorities gave no reason for the rejection.⁷⁴⁸ One source was aware of a Uyghur whose application for Turkish citizenship had been rejected on the grounds that he would pose a risk to security and public order. This was because he had protested at China's diplomatic mission in Türkiye, wearing a T-shirt that read 'Free Uyghur'.⁷⁴⁹

In March 2023, Turkish police raided an Uyghur bookshop in Sefakoy, an Istanbul neighbourhood where many Uyghurs live. The bookshop was run by Abdullah Turkistanli, an Uyghur who had been living in Türkiye since 2009. Police confiscated numerous Uyghur books, alleging Turkistanli had violated copyrights in reproducing them. The authorities eventually relented, and the books were placed back in the shop.⁷⁵⁰

One source questioned whether copyright violations were the true reason for the police raid. In such a case, a visit by tax inspectors from the Turkish Ministry of Treasury and Finance would have been more obvious. The source suspected that the raid had taken place at the instigation of China.⁷⁵¹ This suspicion was widely shared within the Uyghur community.⁷⁵²

As far as is known, no public information was available concerning the extent to which Uyghurs could have their Chinese passports renewed at China's diplomatic mission in Türkiye. According to one source, Uyghurs could have their Chinese passports renewed only under strict conditions. They were required to promise to refrain from criticising the Chinese government and from engaging in any form of human rights activism. They were also required to attend the celebration of Chinese holidays at China's diplomatic mission in Türkiye. The source further noted that they could be pressured to obtain information about other Uyghurs in Türkiye and share it with Chinese authorities.⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁵ University of Sheffield, 'We know you better than you know yourself', 13 April 2023, pp. 59–61. Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷⁴⁶ Al-Monitor, *Turkey detains 6 people suspected of spying on Uyghurs for China*, 20 February 2024. Radio Free Asia (RFA), *Turkey arrests Chinese nationals suspected of surveilling Uyghurs*, 22 February 2024.

⁷⁴⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on China*, December 2022, p. 91.

⁷⁴⁸ University of Sheffield, 'We know you better than you know yourself', 13 April 2023, p. 62.

⁷⁴⁹ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷⁵⁰ The China Project, *China pressured Turkey to bust Uyghur bookseller*, 20 July 2023. Confidential source, 30 November 2024.

⁷⁵¹ Confidential source, 30 November 2024.

⁷⁵² The China Project, *China pressured Turkey to bust Uyghur bookseller*, 20 July 2023.

⁷⁵³ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

Uyghurs without a valid Chinese passport reportedly encountered barriers in society. The lack of a valid passport could be an obstacle when applying for a residence permit or registering a marriage.⁷⁵⁴

The sources consulted gave different answers concerning whether Uyghurs who had previously been entitled to residency in Türkiye would be re-admitted by the Turkish authorities upon returning to Türkiye. One source surmised that the authorities would not be sympathetic to admitting Uyghur returnees.⁷⁵⁵ Another source stated that Uyghurs would be admitted within a year of departure; otherwise, their right to residence in Türkiye would lapse.⁷⁵⁶ Yet another source replied that Uyghurs could return only if their residence permits were still valid.⁷⁵⁷

10.6 Palestinians

Unlike Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and other countries in the region, Türkiye has not traditionally hosted a significant Palestinian diaspora community. As a result of Syria's civil war, Türkiye received an influx of stateless Palestinians from Syria. In 2020, the number of stateless Palestinians from Syria in Türkiye was estimated at around 15,000.⁷⁵⁸ In principle, stateless Palestinians from Syria were eligible for TP (see also 10.2).⁷⁵⁹

Stateless Palestinians from other countries in the region (for example, Jordan and Lebanon) could, in principle, apply for international protection or a visa on humanitarian grounds.⁷⁶⁰ One source added that Palestinians were not a visible group in the Turkish asylum system. They typically regarded Türkiye as a transit country and did not bother to register with the Turkish authorities. Most Palestinians in Türkiye worked illegally and hoped to earn enough money to pay for the trip to Europe, according to the same source.⁷⁶¹

Palestinians in Gaza were virtually unable to come to Türkiye.⁷⁶² The country nevertheless did take in a number of Palestinians with serious health problems from Gaza. They were evacuated to Türkiye through Egypt and were under the responsibility of the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services.⁷⁶³

During the reporting period, a Palestinian student with Jordanian nationality was in danger of being deported by Türkiye. On 24 August 2024, he took part in a demonstration in Istanbul along with pro-Palestinian protesters. The protesters were agitating against the situation in which the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)⁷⁶⁴ was supplying oil to Israel through Turkish territory. Police arrested the Palestinian and placed him in a removal centre.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁵⁴ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷⁵⁵ Confidential source, 11 November 2024.

⁷⁵⁶ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁷⁵⁷ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁵⁸ Bülbul, 'Recognising Palestinian refugees', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2024, pp. 281, 282 and 293.

⁷⁵⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 73. Bülbul, 'Recognising Palestinian refugees', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2024, pp. 282, 283, 287, 288, 290 and 295. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶⁰ Bülbul, 'Recognising Palestinian refugees', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2024, pp. 282, 286 and 295. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶¹ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶² Bülbul, 'Recognising Palestinian refugees', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2024, p. 296. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶³ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶⁴ Additional information on SOCAR is available at <https://socar.az/socar/en/home>.

⁷⁶⁵ Bianet, *Palestinian student faces deportation from Turkey after protesting trade with Israel*, 28 August 2024.

10.7 Syrians

10.7.1 Registration of Syrians

As of July 2023, Türkiye was home to around 3.3 million registered Syrians.⁷⁶⁶ By late November 2024, this number had dropped to around 2.9 million, according to the Turkish government.⁷⁶⁷

TP status holders have access to healthcare and education in their province of registration. Syrian TP status holders wishing to travel outside the province of registration must hold a travel permit. TP status holders found outside the province of registration without a travel permit are to be returned to the province of registration.⁷⁶⁸ In some cases, however, TP status holders without a travel permit have been arrested, transferred to the closed section of a Temporary Accommodation Centre (TAC) or to a removal centre and/or deported to Syria. Authorities reportedly took varying approaches to this.⁷⁶⁹ Additional information on deportations is provided in 10.7.4.

During the preceding reporting period, the TP application process for newly arrived Syrians changed. Since then, they have been required to await the outcome of a TP application in a TAC. These centres were located in south-eastern Türkiye. The TACs were made of containers and managed by the Turkish Ministry of the Interior. During the processing of the application, Syrians had no freedom of movement.⁷⁷⁰

This practice remained in force during the reporting period. Newly arrived Syrians were required to await the outcome of their TP applications in a TAC. Sources noted that the processing of TP applications in TACs was opaque. Applicants were held in a TAC indefinitely. In some cases, they were allowed to leave the TAC after some time, with or without TP status. In other cases, the applicant was transferred to a removal centre and/or deported to Syria (see 10.7.4 for additional information on deportations). The factors that determined the outcome of a TP application in a TAC and under which circumstances remained unclear.⁷⁷¹

The sources consulted independently indicated that Turkish authorities were generally reluctant to provide TP to newly arrived Syrians. Newborn babies and spouses of TP-asylum status holders were eligible for TP status. The same was true for a newly arrived Syrian with a Turkish spouse.⁷⁷²

The birth of every child in Türkiye must be reported to the office of the population register within thirty days. This includes children of Syrian or other foreign nationality. The birth must be declared by the parent (or parents), guardian or a trustee. If the aforementioned actors are absent, the grandparents or adult siblings can approach the office of the population register. Once the parents have received the birth certificate, they are required to submit the document to the PDMM. The PDMM then issues a TP identity card with a unique identity number for the newborn.

⁷⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 81.

⁷⁶⁷ UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response, Türkiye*, most recently updated on 28 November 2024, consulted on 11 December 2024.

⁷⁶⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 82. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁶⁹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁷⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 81.

⁷⁷¹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁷² Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

At least one of the parents must be registered as a TP status holder to obtain a birth certificate for the newborn child. Birth registration does not require the parents to be married to each other.⁷⁷³

During the reporting period, however, there was a gap between the laws and regulations, as set out above, and their implementation in practice. Offices of the population register had different ways of dealing with the requirements regarding the issuance of a birth certificate.⁷⁷⁴ For example, one source was aware of a couple in which the father was registered as a TP status holder and the mother was not. In this case, the authorities refused to issue a birth certificate, the source stated.⁷⁷⁵

10.7.2 *Naturalisation of Syrians*

In September 2017, some fifty thousand Syrians reportedly obtained Turkish citizenship. This purportedly involved people with high levels of education, such as doctors, engineers and teachers.⁷⁷⁶ In late November 2023, this number had increased to 238,555, according to Turkish Interior Minister Yerlikaya.⁷⁷⁷

Syrians can obtain Turkish citizenship based on three options:

1. The person concerned has been married to a Turkish national for at least three years and can provide proof that they are living together.
2. The person concerned has a Turkish work permit and has worked continuously in Türkiye for five years.
3. The person concerned has made investments.⁷⁷⁸

The naturalisation of Syrians was a politically sensitive issue. This was because the opposition feared that, in elections, naturalised Syrians would vote for President Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP).⁷⁷⁹ Given the growing anti-Syrian sentiment in Turkish society, the authorities were said to be less likely to naturalise Syrians, according to one source (see 10.7.3 for additional information on anti-Syrian sentiments).⁷⁸⁰

The following incident stood out during the reporting period. On 27 May 2024, Turkish authorities revoked the Turkish citizenship of Taha al-Ghazi,⁷⁸¹ a human rights activist who was Syrian by origin.⁷⁸² According to one source, his Turkish citizenship had been revoked because he had been critical of the conditions of Syrians in removal centres.⁷⁸³

10.7.3 *Anti-Syrian sentiments*

As stated in the two preceding COI Reports, strong anti-Syrian sentiments were present in Turkish society. These sentiments sometimes erupted violently, as in Altındağ (a suburb of Ankara) in August 2021⁷⁸⁴ and in Dilovası in July 2023.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁷³ Confidential source, 28 January 2025.

⁷⁷⁴ Confidential source, 28 January 2025.

⁷⁷⁵ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁷⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, Documents*, December 2019, p. 58.

⁷⁷⁷ The Syrian Observer, *Turkey revokes citizenship of Syrian human rights activist Taha al-Ghazi*, 18 July 2024.

⁷⁷⁸ Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

⁷⁷⁹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁸⁰ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁸¹ Also spelt 'Taha Elgazi'.

⁷⁸² The Syrian Observer, *Turkey revokes citizenship of Syrian human rights activist Taha al-Ghazi*, 18 July 2024.

⁷⁸³ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁸⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, March 2022, p. 77.

⁷⁸⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 84.

On 30 June 2024, anti-Syrian violence broke out in Kayseri, an industrial city in central Türkiye. The violence was triggered by the arrest of a Syrian man who was suspected of assaulting his underage niece. In response, hundreds of Turks took to the streets. They chanted xenophobic slogans and damaged houses, shops and cars said to be owned by Syrians. The anti-Syrian riots spread to other provinces, including Adana and Hatay. Turkish authorities condemned this violent expression of xenophobia and arrested more than 470 people.⁷⁸⁶

Some Turkish nationals harboured no antipathy towards the Syrian refugee community. Some Kurdish and Arab Turks were linguistically and culturally related to the Syrians and felt connected to them. Some Kurdish Turks, who had themselves been displaced in the 1990s as a result of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) could relate well to the plight of Syrian refugees. Historically conscious Turks recalled that Türkiye and Syria had once belonged to the same Ottoman Empire, and they did not perceive the presence of Syrians as problematic, given this historical relationship and the shared Islamic faith. This did not alter the fact that anti-Syrian sentiments were widespread, including amongst Kurdish Turks.⁷⁸⁷

Syrian trans women were discriminated against both because of their Syrian nationality and for their transgender identity. It was particularly difficult for them to secure work. They also faced other hardships, including violence, economic exploitation and psychological pressure.⁷⁸⁸ For example, a group of men attacked two Syrian trans women on the street in Izmir on 9 October 2024. The men threw stones at the two trans women and beat them. A day later, the trans women filed a report with the police.⁷⁸⁹ The situation of transgender people in Türkiye is addressed in 8.5.

10.7.4 Syrian deportees

During the preceding reporting period, reports emerged that Turkish authorities were deporting Syrians to Syria.⁷⁹⁰ Such reports also appeared during the current reporting period. Sources had heard stories about this. Prior to their deportation, they had been held in detention and had been forced – physically or otherwise – to sign a form. In this form, they signed for their 'voluntary' return.⁷⁹¹ Reasons for deportation varied. In some cases, individuals had travelled outside the province of registration without a travel permit. In other cases, neighbours had filed complaints against them.⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁶ Bianet, *Violent protests target refugee community in Turkey's Kayseri after alleged sexual assault on minor*, published on 1 July 2024, updated on 2 July 2024. Middle East Eye (MEE), *Turkey, Syrian businesses set ablaze after reports child was sexually abused*, 1 July 2024. Al Jazeera, *Protests and arrests as anti-Syrian riots rock Turkey*, 2 July 2024. NOS, *Meer dan 470 arrestaties in Turkije na geweld tegen Syriërs*, 2 July 2024. Trouw, *Geweld tegen Syriërs laait op in Turkije*, 3 July 2024.

⁷⁸⁷ Şen et al. (eds.), *The political psychology of Kurds in Turkey*, published in 2023, pp. 110, 111, 113, 115, 116, 118, 119 and 121.

⁷⁸⁸ Kaos GL, *'Syrian trans women refugees struggle with both systemic barriers and prejudices'*, 2 December 2024.

⁷⁸⁹ Kaos GL, *Lynch attempt against Syrian trans women in Izmir*, 11 October 2024.

⁷⁹⁰ Middle East Eye (MEE), *Turkey, After being vilified in elections, Syrian refugees are being deported en masse*, 27 July 2023. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, pp. 85 and 86.

⁷⁹¹ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁷⁹² Confidential source, 12 November 2024.

The scale at which Syrians and other foreigners were deported was troubling. According to *Middle East Eye* (MEE),⁷⁹³ Turkish authorities deported two thousand Syrians to Syria in July 2023.⁷⁹⁴ In late March 2024, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Turkish authorities had arrested, detained and deported thousands of Syrians to Syria since 2017.⁷⁹⁵ In October 2024, Lighthouse Reports⁷⁹⁶ stated that Türkiye had 'systematically' deported hundreds of thousands of Afghans and Syrians in recent years. Lighthouse Reports based this on a survey, in which 8 newspapers and 21 journalists had participated. In all, more than one hundred sources had been consulted, including almost forty current or former detainees, as well as dozens of lawyers, diplomats, EU officials, removal centre staff, current and former Turkish officials, and academics.⁷⁹⁷

As in the preceding reporting period,⁷⁹⁸ non-Syrians were also deported to Syria. For example, in August 2023, MEE reported that Turkish authorities had deported two Moroccans to the northern Syrian town of Azaz. Both of these individuals had tried to reach the EU illegally through Türkiye. The two Moroccans said that they had made it clear that they were not Syrians, but Moroccans. Nevertheless, Türkiye deported them to Syria.⁷⁹⁹

In some cases, the deportation of a Syrian had a fatal outcome. In July 2024, Turkish authorities deported a Syrian trans woman to Syria through the border crossing at Cilvegözü. She was known only by the initials 'M.E.'. After returning, she was killed by an armed faction, in cooperation with her family.⁸⁰⁰ The situation of transgender people in Türkiye is addressed in 8.5.

In August 2024, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), a Syrian human rights organisation,⁸⁰¹ announced that Abdullah Hussein al-Akhras had been killed. Abdullah had deserted from the Syrian government army and was living as a refugee in Türkiye. In mid-2023, he was deported to north-western Syria. In September 2023, Syrian government forces intercepted him at a checkpoint in Aleppo.⁸⁰² In early August 2024, Abdullah's relatives received his remains from military authorities.⁸⁰³

In September 2024, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)⁸⁰⁴ announced that a young Syrian man had died at the hands of the Syrian regime. Turkish authorities had deported him to Syria through the border crossing at Bab al-Hawa. In Aleppo, the Syrian had tried to buy off his compulsory military service. He nevertheless died as a result of torture by the security apparatus of President Bashar al-Assad (hereinafter: Assad).⁸⁰⁵

⁷⁹³ MEE is based in the United Kingdom (UK) and focuses on the Middle East and North Africa. Additional information on MEE is available at <https://www.middleeasteye.net>.

⁷⁹⁴ MEE, *Hundreds of Syrians left in limbo after being deported from Turkey*, 12 August 2023.

⁷⁹⁵ HRW, *Syrians face dire conditions in Turkish-occupied 'safe zone'*, 28 March 2024.

⁷⁹⁶ Lighthouse Reports is a non-profit organisation that promotes international investigative journalism. Additional information on Lighthouse Reports is available at <https://www.lighthousereports.com>.

⁷⁹⁷ Lighthouse Reports, *Turkey's EU-funded deportation machine*, 11 October 2024. NRC, *Mishandeld in een Turks uitzetcentrum*, 11 October 2024. POLITICO, *The EU is helping Turkey forcibly deport migrants to Syria and Afghanistan*, 11 October 2024.

⁷⁹⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 89.

⁷⁹⁹ MEE, *Moroccan migrants deported from Turkey to northern Syria*, 15 August 2023.

⁸⁰⁰ Duvar English, *Refugee trans woman deported by Turkey over HIV status killed in Syria*, 27 July 2024. Kaos GL, *Deported refugee trans woman murdered*, 29 July 2024.

⁸⁰¹ Additional information on the SNHR is available at <https://snhr.org>.

⁸⁰² In Arabic, *Halab*.

⁸⁰³ SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Türkiye*, 9 August 2024.

⁸⁰⁴ The SOHR is based in the UK and monitors human rights violations in Syria. Additional information on the SOHR is available at <https://www.syriaohr.com>.

⁸⁰⁵ SOHR, *Despite settling his status, Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo*, 11 September 2024.

10.7.5 *Voluntary return and the fall of Assad*

During the preceding reporting period, the Turkish government announced the voluntary return of one million Syrians to northern Syria within three years. This return was intended to be voluntary and safe. Areas in northern Syria, which had been designated for housing Syrian returnees, were under the administration of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG). This interim government had emerged from a coalition of opposition groups. In the SIG's area of control, Türkiye built houses, schools, hospitals and infrastructure projects in order to accommodate the reception of Syrians. Qatar funded this construction work.⁸⁰⁶

During the reporting period, the Turkish authorities continued on the path taken. Turkish authorities were committed to stabilisation, humanitarian aid and reconstruction in Syria, in order to promote large-scale voluntary returns.⁸⁰⁷ For example, Türkiye aimed to build about 240,000 houses in northern Syria over the next three years.⁸⁰⁸

According to the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, around eleven thousand Syrians returned to Syria each month.⁸⁰⁹ According to the Turkish government, a total of 729,761 Syrians had returned to Syria from Türkiye between 2016 and 2024.⁸¹⁰ Such figures from the Turkish government could not be further verified.⁸¹¹ One source pointed out that some deportations were recorded as voluntary returns.⁸¹²

Syrians wishing to return to Syria voluntarily could make this known at the immigration office in their province of registration. A provincial branch of the PMM is known as a Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM). In interviews with immigration authorities, it was made clear to Syrians that their TP registration would expire upon their return. Once Syrians crossed the Turkish-Syrian border, they were on their own.⁸¹³

On 8 December 2024, the Assad regime came to an end. Syrians across Türkiye celebrated his fall.⁸¹⁴ With Assad's departure, the Turkish government expected its voluntary return programme to gain new momentum. On 10 December 2024, President Erdoğan announced that the Yayladağı border crossing, which had been closed since 2013, would be re-opened to facilitate the voluntary return of Syrians.⁸¹⁵ Yayladağı is located in the southern province of Hatay.

At the time of writing, limited returns to Syria had taken place from Türkiye. Many Syrians in Türkiye were reluctant to return to Syria because of the lack of basic services and employment opportunities. They also had concerns about the political, economic and security situation. Most returnees were young men wishing to check out conditions in their country of origin. Many of them left their families behind in Türkiye. At the time of writing, seven border crossings were open – four for

⁸⁰⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 86.

⁸⁰⁷ Confidential source, 27 January 2025.

⁸⁰⁸ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye eyes new model for safe return of Syrians*, 14 August 2023. TRT World, *Aleppo Model, Paving the way for safe return of Syrian refugees in Türkiye*, 29 August 2023.

⁸⁰⁹ Daily Sabah, *Thousands of Syrians return home monthly from Türkiye*, 14 October 2024.

⁸¹⁰ Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), *Illegal pushbacks and border violence reports*, November 2024, p. 28.

⁸¹¹ Confidential source, 15 April 2024.

⁸¹² Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸¹³ Confidential source, 12 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸¹⁴ Duvar English, *Syrian refugees celebrate fall of Assad across Turkey*, 8 December 2024. HDN, *Syrian refugees in Türkiye celebrate fall of Assad*, 9 December 2024.

⁸¹⁵ Daily Sabah, *Türkiye to open Syria border gate for return of refugees: Erdoğan*, 9 December 2024. Duvar English, *Turkey to reopen border gate closed since 2013 for Syrians' return*, 10 December 2024. Confidential source, 12 December 2024.

permanent returns and three for 'go-and-see' visits.⁸¹⁶ Up to three of these temporary visits to Syria were allowed. This allowed Syrians to explore the situation in the country of origin and prepare for a possible permanent return. Upon final return, TP status lapsed and Syrians were required to surrender their *Kimlik* (Turkish identity document). On go-and-see visits, Syrians did not lose their TP status.⁸¹⁷

As noted above, seven border crossings were open on the Turkish-Syrian border at the time of writing. The diagram below shows which border crossings were open and the type of return for which they were intended. The overview schedule is based on information from a confidential source.⁸¹⁸

Open border crossings on the Turkish-Syrian border (27 January 2025)

Turkish border town	Syrian border town	Type of return
Akçakale (Province of Şanlıurfa)	Tell Abyad	Permanent return
Cilvegözü (Province of Hatay)	Bab al-Hawa	Permanent return
Çobanbey (Province of Kilis)	Al-Ra'ee	Go-and-see visits
Karkamış (Province of Gaziantep)	Jarablus	Go-and-see visits
Öncüpınar (Province of Kilis)	Bab al-Salam ⁸¹⁹	Permanent return
Yayladağı (Province of Hatay)	Kasab ⁸²⁰	Permanent return
Zeytindalı (Province of Hatay)	Jinderes ⁸²¹	Go-and-see visits

According to Turkish authorities, more than 7,600 Syrians permanently returned to Syria from Türkiye between 9 and 13 December 2024.⁸²² On 24 December 2024, the Turkish Interior Minister Yerlikaya announced that nearly 25,000 Syrians had permanently returned from Türkiye to Syria since 9 December 2024. Most were from Hatay, Gaziantep and Istanbul. Many of them went to Aleppo, Idlib and Lattakia.⁸²³ On 27 December 2024, the number of returnees had risen to over 30,000, according to Yerlikaya.⁸²⁴ According to the same minister, the number of permanent Syrian returnees had reached more than 52,000 as of 9 January 2025,⁸²⁵ and it exceeded 81,000 as of 29 January 2025.⁸²⁶ These developments are depicted in the graph below.

⁸¹⁶ Also known as temporary exit.

⁸¹⁷ Confidential source, 12 December 2024. Confidential source, 15 December 2024. Confidential source, 27 January 2025.

⁸¹⁸ Confidential source, 5 February 2025.

⁸¹⁹ In Arabic, this name literally means 'Gate of Peace'.

⁸²⁰ Also spelt 'Kesab' or 'Kessab'.

⁸²¹ Also spelt 'Jindires'.

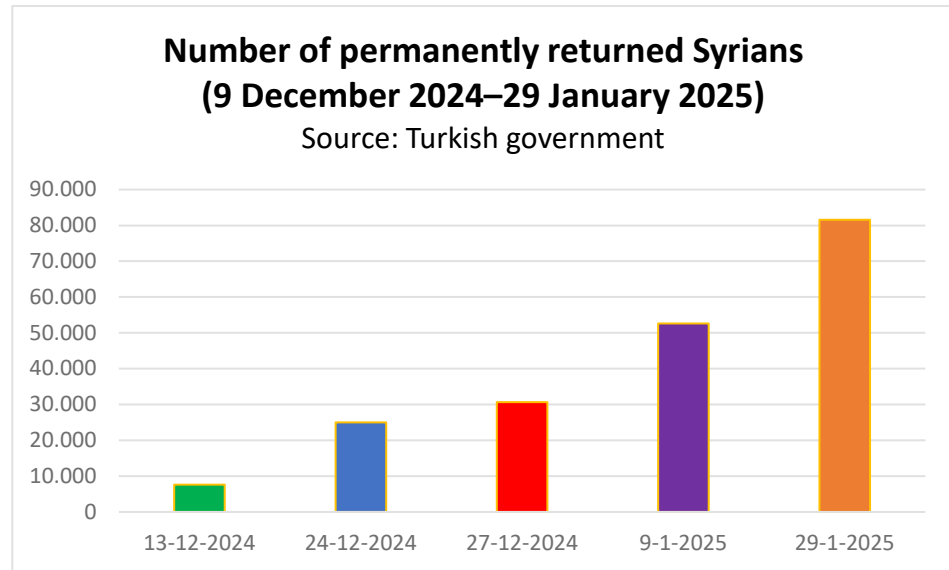
⁸²² HDN, *7,600 Syrians returned via Turkish borders since Assad's fall*, 15 December 2024. Rûdaw, *Over 7,500 Syrians return from Turkey in just five days: Minister*, 15 December 2024.

⁸²³ UNHCR, *Regional flash update, Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024, p. 3.

⁸²⁴ Al Jazeera, *More than 30,000 Syrians returned home since al-Assad's fall, Türkiye says*, 27 December 2024.

⁸²⁵ AA, *Over 52,000 Syrians return to their homeland since Assad regime's downfall last month*, 9 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *More than 52,000 'pioneer' refugees return to Syria from Türkiye*, 9 January 2025. Türkiye Today, *Türkiye facilitates voluntary return of over 52,000 Syrians in December 2024*, 9 January 2025.

⁸²⁶ AA, *Türkiye reports over 81,000 voluntary returns of Syrians since fall of Assad regime*, 29 January 2025. Daily Sabah, *Over 81,000 Syrians return from Türkiye to Syria after Assad's ouster*, 30 January 2025. Middle East Monitor (MEMO), *Türkiye: 81,500 Syrians returned after fall of regime*, 30 January 2025.



11 Return

It was not possible to obtain a comprehensive overview of the potential challenges that Turkish citizens might face upon returning to Türkiye. As far as could be ascertained, there is no monitoring system in place to track the experiences of returnees to Türkiye, nor are there any dedicated individuals or agencies specialising in the challenges faced by those who return (or are forcibly returned) to Türkiye.⁸²⁷ As a result, the information on which this chapter is based is anecdotal, fragmented and based on a single source.

This source observed that, during the reporting period, the number of rejected asylum applications in the EU increased (especially in Germany), as did the number of Turkish nationals returning to Türkiye. The same source could not say with certainty that there was a causal link between the two developments, but did not rule it out.⁸²⁸

The source was of the opinion that rejected asylum seekers did not necessarily face problems with the Turkish authorities upon returning to Türkiye. This was heavily dependent on individual circumstances, according to the source. Returnees who were already subject to legal proceedings could be arrested or receive a summons upon return. In this context, the source gave the hypothetical example of a returnee with a debt outstanding at a bank. During the person's absence, the creditor has filed a lawsuit and, upon return, the person may face a court order.⁸²⁹

When asked, the source reported not knowing whether it mattered what type of document a person was carrying upon return. The source was only aware of passport holders who had returned to Türkiye.⁸³⁰ Leaving Türkiye illegally does not constitute a criminal offence.⁸³¹

The Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Services is responsible for the reception of unaccompanied minors returning to Türkiye.⁸³²

⁸²⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 91.

⁸²⁸ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸²⁹ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸³⁰ Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸³¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 91. Confidential source, 15 November 2024.

⁸³² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Türkiye*, August 2023, p. 91.; confidential source, 15 November 2024.

12 Appendices

12.1 Abbreviations and foreign terms

AFAD	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency)
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ALS	amyotrophic lateral sclerosis
ATK	Adli Tıp Kurumu (Council of Forensic Medicine)
AYM	Anayasa Mahkemesi (Constitutional Court)
BTK	Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu (Information and Communications Technologies Authority)
BTÖ	Bölücü Terör Örgütü (Separatist Terrorist Organisation, term used by the Turkish government when referring to the PKK)
CAT	UN Committee against Torture
cemevi	Alevi place of worship
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
COI	Country of Origin Information
COPD	chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
dede	Alevi faith leader
DEM	Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (People's Equality and Democracy Party)
DHKP/C	Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi (Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front)
Diyanet	Directorate of Religious Affairs
DW	Deutsche Welle
E-devlet	citizen's gateway to online government services ('electronic government')
GBT	Genel Bilgi Toplama Sistemi (General Information Gathering System)
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
FETÖ	Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü (Fethullah Terrorist Organisation, term used by the Turkish government when referring to the Gülen movement)
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Democratic People's Party)
HEDEP	Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (People's Equality and Democracy Party)
Hizmet	servitude (term used by Gülenist adherents when referring to the Gülen movement)
HRW	Human Rights Watch

HSK	Hâkimler ve Savcılar Kurulu (Council of Judges and Prosecutors)
HÜDA PAR	Hür Dava Partisi (Free Cause Party)
ICG	International Crisis Group
İFÖD	İfade Özgürlüğü Derneği (Freedom of Expression Association)
İHD	İnsan Hakları Derneği (Human Rights Association, HRA)
IPI	International Press Institute
IS	Islamic State
ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province
kayyum	pro-government trustee replacing democratically elected mayor
KCDP	Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu (We Will Stop Femicides Platform, WWSF)
Kimlik	Turkish identity document
MA	Mezopotamya Agency
MEE	Middle East Eye
METU	Middle East Technical University
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
MİT	Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı (national security service)
Mor Çatı	Purple Roof
Newroz	Kurdish New Year
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PDMM	Provincial Directorate of Migration Management
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management
RSF	Reporters sans frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
RTÜK	Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (Radio and Television Supreme Council)
CoE	Council of Europe
SGK	Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu (Social Security System)
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOCAR	State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic
SOGI	sexual orientation and gender identity
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
TAC	Temporary Accommodation Centre
TBB	Türkiye Barolar Birliği (Union of Turkish Bar Associations)
TDoR	Transgender Day of Remembrance
TİHEK	Türkiye İnsan Hakları ve Eşitlik Kurumu (Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye)
TİHV	Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı (Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye, HRFT)
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party

TİP	Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Workers' Party of Türkiye)
TMF	Turkish Maarif Foundation
ToR	Terms of Reference
TP	Temporary protection
TTB	Türk Tabipleri Birliği (Turkish Medical Association, TMA)
TTM	Tarlabası Toplum Merkezi
TUSAŞ	Türk Havacılık ve Uzay Sanayii Anonim Şirketi (Turkish Aerospace Industries, TAI)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UYAP	Ulusal Yargı Ağı Projesi (National Judiciary Informatics System of the Turkish Government)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
VOA	Voice of America
US	United States
LoFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
YRP	Yeniden Refah Partisi (New Welfare Party)
YSK	Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Supreme Election Council, SEC)
YSP	Yeşil Sol Parti (Green Left Party)

12.2 Newspapers and news platforms

Agos
 Al Jazeera
 Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF International)
 Al-Monitor
 Anadolu Agency/Ajansı (AA)
 Appenzeller Zeitung
 ARMENPRESS
 Artı Gerçek
 Associated Press (AP)
 Balkan Insight (BI)
 Bianet
 Bloomberg
 British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)
 Clingendael Institute
 Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
 Council of Europe (CoE)
 Council of Judges and Prosecutors (CJP)
 Daily Sabah
 De Morgen
 De Standaard
 Die Welt
 District governorship of Oğuzeli
 Dutch Broadcasting Foundation (NOS)
 Duvar English
 Equaldex
 EUObserver

Euractiv
European Parliament
Gazete Duvar
Financial Times (FT)
Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Democratic Peoples' Party, HDP)
Heinrich Böll Stiftung
Het Parool
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)
Hürriyet Daily News (HDN)
İnsan Hakları Derneği (Human Rights Association, İHD)
International Crisis Group (ICG)
International Press Institute (IPI)
Iran Wire
JINHA
Kaos GL
Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Le Monde
Lighthouse Reports
Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)
Middle East Eye (MEE)
Middle East Monitor (MEMO)
Minority Azerbaijan
Minority Rights Group
Nation
Nederlands Dagblad (ND)
Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (NRC)
NU.nl
Open Caucasus Media (OC Media)
P.A. Turkey
POLITICO
Qha
Radio Free Asia (RFA)
Reformatorisch Dagblad (RD)
Reporters sans frontières (RSF)
Reuters
RTL Nieuws
Rûdaw
Şalom Turkey
Serbestiyet
Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)
T24
Tages-Anzeiger (TA)
The Economist
The China Project
The Guardian
The Independent
The New York Times
The Syrian Observer
The Times of Israel
The Washington Post
Trend News Agency
Trouw

TRT World
Turkey recap (Tr)
Türkiye Today
Turkish Ministry of Defence
Turkish Ministry of Justice
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
World Bank Group (WBG)

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