

World Report 2025 - Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan's government imposes harsh restrictions on free expression and exerts total control over access to information. It allows no space for dissent and prohibits activity by unregistered nongovernmental organizations. Authorities continue to impose arbitrary foreign travel bans and engage in transnational repression including by denying Turkmen the ability to renew their passport abroad.

Many wrongfully imprisoned individuals remain behind bars, and the fate of dozens of victims of enforced disappearances remains unknown.

Shortages of subsidized food continue. Authorities restrict women's and girls' rights. Consensual same-sex conduct between men is a criminal offense under Turkmen law, punishable by a maximum two-year prison sentence.

Freedom of Movement, Denial of Passports

In 2024 Turkmen authorities continued to groundlessly bar people from boarding international flights or otherwise travel abroad. Obtaining biometric passports inside Turkmenistan has become an ordeal for many Turkmen citizens, with additional requirements imposed and waits as long as two years, unless one is willing to pay a bribe. The government tightly controls internal migration.

In September authorities orally ordered public sector workers to surrender their passports to prevent them from foreign travel. In August the administrations of two universities required newly admitted students to surrender their passports to prevent their foreign travel. Students of one university were required to sign a statement confirming they would not leave Turkmenistan until graduation or face expulsion.

In August, authorities arbitrarily, and without explanation, prevented some Turkmen citizens from travelling to Uzbekistan.

On November 20, authorities forcibly hospitalized an independent journalist, Soltan Achilova, to prevent her from traveling to Geneva to attend human rights events, falsely claiming that she had an infectious disease.

Authorities continue to refuse to renew Turkmen passports through consular services, forcing Turkmen citizens living abroad to return to the country. This requirement is arbitrary, violates freedom of movement, and involves risk of being barred from further travel abroad. For foreign-based activists, it also involves risk of persecution upon return.

Treatment of Government Critics

Turkmen authorities do not tolerate any dissent or criticism. Civic activists and government critics, including those in exile and their families, face constant threat of government reprisal.

In June, security and law enforcement officers conducted unannounced searches at the homes of migrant workers who had returned from abroad. Officials summoned such individuals, confiscated their devices allegedly to identify "unreliable" citizens who might have worked with independent outlets or exiled dissidents, and held them in detention without water and food for several days.

Rovshen Klychev, who had openly criticized the government on social media and was deported from Türkiye to Turkmenistan in July 2023, was reportedly sentenced to 17 years in prison on

unknown criminal charges.

In August, a court convicted Merdan Mukhamedov, an activist with an exiled political opposition group, on multiple criminal charges, including conspiracy to overthrow the government, in a closed trial, following his deportation from Türkiye in June. His sentence was not made public.

Turkmen authorities are believed to have requested Turkish authorities to bar at least two exiled Turkmen activists from entering Türkiye. [On July 25](#), Turkish authorities deported Ruslan Myatiev, the editor of Turkmen.news, on alleged “national security” grounds, and in November 2023, they deported Tajigul Begmedova, head of the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, on similar grounds.

On June 8, authorities [released](#) Nurgeldy Khalykov, a Turkmen.news freelance correspondent, after he served out his four-year prison sentence on fabricated fraud charges. But many others remain imprisoned on bogus, politically motivated charges. They include [Mansur Mengelov](#), [Murad Dushemov](#), Murat Ovezov, and [Myalikberdy Allamuradov](#).

In October, assailants in Boston beat Daud Kyarizov, media editor with a Turkmen exiled activist group. The attack happened one week after his family publicized the UN Human Rights Committee’s finding that Turkmenistan’s government had violated the rights of Kyarizov’s exiled father, Geldy, when he was imprisoned in the 2000’s and that it should compensate him.

Political Prisoners, Enforced Disappearances

Dozens of people arrested in the late 1990s and early 2000s remain forcibly disappeared in Turkmen prisons. There are an [estimated](#) 96 continuing enforced disappearances, including at least 33 individuals whose prison terms expired between 2017 and 2024 but whose fates and whereabouts remain unknown. During its annual [human rights dialogue](#) with Turkmenistan in June 2024, the EU raised continued concerns about enforced disappearances and “a number of individual human rights cases,” stressing the importance of access by the International Committee of the Red Cross and UN special procedures.

Twenty-six men tried on a variety of charges in closed trials and sentenced to up to 25 years in 2017 for having links to the movement led by deceased US-based Turkish Sunni Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen, whom Türkiye blames for masterminding the 2016 attempted military coup in Türkiye, remained behind bars.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Turkmenistan’s government failed to ensure an adequate standard of living and the right to food for economically marginalized groups. Authorities respond to complaints about food shortages and price increases with fines and interrogations.

Independent reporting in 2024 indicated that the availability of subsidized food staples continued to [shrink](#) while [prices](#), including for state subsidized foods, continued to [rise significantly](#).

In February security services [reportedly](#) interrogated residents in the Mary region after they tried to meet the mayor to express frustration over price increases for flour and bread in state stores.

Sporadic [bread shortages](#) in state stores, at subsidized prices, continued. [Authorities](#) tightly control bread sales and queues in state food stores to create an appearance of “cheap, available bread.”

Freedom of Media and Information

There is no media freedom in Turkmenistan. Access to the internet remains severely limited, with more than 122,000 internet domains [blocked](#) countrywide.

Turkmen authorities continue to crackdown on users and providers of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs). In February, Balkan province authorities turned off internet service in the homes of people who use VPNs often and restored it only after users [signed](#) a written undertaking promising not to use VPNs. The authorities restored internet service to hundreds of residents only after the security services searched their phones for suspicious content. In one school, police [searched](#) students' phones. They questioned the parents of students who had VPNs seeking evidence of engagement on certain social media on their devices. Authorities designated these families "[unreliable](#)."

Freedom of Religion

The Turkmen authorities tightly monitor registered religious groups and forbid unregistered congregations, and groups. Individuals who allegedly engage in religious activities beyond state-approved religions are severely punished and sentenced to lengthy prison sentences.

In May, police and security services in one region [pressured](#) ethnic Turkmens, Tatars, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and their families not to attend orthodox churches and to "return" to Islam.

In July, security services and a religious affairs official [visited](#) the family of Rahymjan Borjakov, a pastor, seeking information about his other relatives. Borjakov is a head of an unregistered protestant church.

In April, [security services](#) warned state sector employees who had taken part in the annual Hajj Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca not to display their faith at work, grow beards, or wear white headscarves, forcing those who refuse "to sign "voluntary" resignation letters."

Women's and Girls' Rights

[Abortions](#) after five weeks of pregnancy [remain outlawed](#). In August, authorities visited medical institutions, [warning](#) practitioners that performing abortions would result in loss of their diplomas. There are widespread reports of serious restrictions on women's and girls' autonomy. This includes arbitrary requirements, such as a minimum age of 35 to obtain [drivers' licenses](#), and, in Mary and Balkan regions, [mandatory](#) gynecological examinations for secondary school girls to verify their "moral purity." So-called "virginity testing" is an abusive practice that is not merely unscientific, but a form of violence that may constitute torture.

In its [sixth periodic report](#) on Turkmenistan, in February 2024, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed concern about these restrictions and practices. It also noted reports of pressure on women and girls to uphold societal gender stereotypes, lack of legislation criminalizing domestic violence, women's and girls' lack of access to adequate sexual and reproductive health services, and "forced virginity testing on young girls in cases of rape."