

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1644
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)
Titel:	Briefing Notes
Udgivet:	4. november 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	4. december 2024



Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

04 November 2024

Afghanistan

Security situation

According to their own accounts, the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Afghanistan Freedom Front killed or wounded nine Taliban in Kabul on 28.10. and 01.11.24.¹

Persecution

At least 18 people were arrested in Kabul, Farah and Kandahar provinces between 29.10. and 02.11.24 for "moral corruption" (e.g. extra-marital relationships). Such arrests have become more frequent since the so-called "morality law" was passed. Public floggings have also taken place in a number of provinces. An update on the human rights situation which was published on 31.10.24 states that the Taliban carried out corporal punishment in a total of 111 cases between July and September 2024. It was reported on 03.11.24 that the Taliban had expelled students from university in Nangarhar province for failing to wear a beard or turban.

On 26.10.24 the Taliban arrested a former police officer in Kapisa province. No further details have emerged. The former commander of a militia which fought against the Taliban with the army was shot dead by unknown attackers in Sar-e Pol province on 31.10.24.

In a report published on 29.10.24 on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, the UN's special rapporteur, Richard Bennett, draws particular attention to sexual violence against women in the custody of the Taliban.

On 30.10.24 it was reported from Kandahar province that the Taliban had beaten several car salesmen unconscious during a tax collection operation.

On 30.10.24 the Taliban temporarily shut down a radio station in Khost province for using background music in a news programme. The Taliban are calling on journalists not to be influenced by the "international propaganda war" against the Taliban.

It was reported on 31.10.24 that the Taliban had sentenced the former chairman of the provincial council of Panjshir province in absentia and without legal counsel to twelve years' imprisonment. The Taliban accused him of having supported the NRF. He has been held in custody by the Taliban since February 2024. He was previously arrested shortly after the Taliban came to power and subsequently released on bail.

According to reports on 03.11.24, the Taliban in Kabul arrested a man originating from Panjshir province for filming a traffic accident. The Taliban had previously only explicitly prohibited the filming of security incidents.²

Humanitarian situation

It was reported from Kabul on 27.10.24 that the situation with regard to the supply of drinking water is becoming increasingly tense. Many families have to queue for hours on end to buy water at rising prices. The price of firewood has also increased by around 50 % compared to last year. As many households cannot afford the wood, families are increasingly resorting to burning plastic.³

Chad

Serious attack by Boko Haram on military base

Citing the presidential administration, it has been reported in the media that around 40 soldiers were killed in an attack on a military base in Barkaram (Lac province, around the Lake Chad basin) on the border with Nigeria on the night of 27.10.24. The presidential administration has blamed the attack on Boko Haram, though no affirmation has been forthcoming to date. The attackers reportedly took control of the military base, seized weapons, set fire to vehicles and then withdrew. President Mahamat Idriss Déby is said to have visited the scene of the attack on 28.10.24 and has ordered an operation to track down the attackers.

Boko Haram is split into two factions – Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS). The attack in Barkaram was within JAS' sphere of influence. According to experts cited in reports in the media, the rivalry between the two factions is giving rise to an increasing number of acts of terrorism. Despite suffering setbacks, Boko Haram repeatedly demonstrates its ability to reorganise and to develop complex strategies.

According to IOM, more than 220,000 internally displaced people are registered in Lac province as a result of attacks by armed groups.⁴

Georgia

Demonstrations in Tbilisi and recounts at some polling stations after parliamentary election

In the aftermath of the parliamentary elections on 26.10.24 (cf. BN of 28.10.24), which were overshadowed by accusations of fraud, on the evening of 28.10.24 tens of thousands of people gathered in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, to demonstrate peacefully against the officially declared victory of the governing Georgian Dream party. Representatives of the pro-European opposition called for a rerun of the election under international supervision. The elected MPs of the opposition parties are apparently refusing to join what they consider to be an illegal parliament until such a rerun takes place. It is reportedly also planned to hold daily protests against the disputed election result as of 02.11.24.

The opposition's accusation of fraud led to vote recounts at some polling stations after the parliamentary election. According to the electoral authority, these recounts confirmed the governing Georgian Dream party as the winner. The recounts at around 12 % of polling stations, comprising some 14 % of the total vote, allegedly did not lead to any substantial changes to the previously announced official results. These accorded the pro-Russian Georgian Dream party 53.9 % of the vote and the four opposition alliances elected to parliament 37.8 % of the vote.

International observers have also voiced doubts about the official result, referring to substantial irregularities such as marking other people's ballot papers, bribery, intimidation of voters and violence near polling stations - without mentioning election fraud, however. The EU and the USA have called for an investigation into such incidents and greater transparency. The Georgian public prosecutor's office has since launched investigations into cases of suspected ballot rigging. According to the public prosecutor's office, two people have been arrested and charged with election fraud to date. The persons concerned are accused of having placed forged ballot papers in a ballot box. 47 cases of suspected irregularities are reportedly under investigation at present.⁵

Ghana

Parliamentary proceedings suspended after legal dispute

Proceedings in the Ghanaian parliament were suspended on 22.10.24 after an internal legal battle broke out. According to reports in the media, the dispute in parliament resulted from a conflict between MPs of the governing New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the largest opposition party, National Democratic Congress (NDC). Four MPs (three from the NPP and one from the NDC) announced in mid-October 2024 that they intended to run as independent candidates in the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections on 07.12.24.

On 17.10.24 the speaker of parliament, himself a member of the NDC, subsequently declared the four parliamentary seats vacant, stating that the law prohibited MPs from changing party during a term in office. This decision overturned the parliamentary majority in NDC's favour.

In the next session of parliament, a row flared up about the official parliamentary majority, which the NDC now claimed to hold. All parliamentary activities were duly suspended.

The governing party accused the speaker of parliament of bias and appealed to the Supreme Court.

On 30.10.24 the Supreme Court in Accra ruled that the speaker of parliament must revoke his decision to declare the four seats vacant. On the basis of the Ghanaian constitution, the Supreme Court declared that it was forbidden for MPs to change party during their term in office, as this would undermine the electorate's trust in MPs and lead to instability in parliament.

Following this ruling by the Supreme Court, the governing NPP party regained its majority in parliament.⁶

Iran

Tehran student arrested after removing her clothes in public

It was reported in the media on 02.11.24 that a young woman had been arrested after undressing down to her underwear at the private Azad University in Tehran. An unverified video has circulated in social media, showing the student in her underwear, first sitting on steps with her arms folded and then walking up and down. Further recordings reportedly show the woman being forced into a car, presumably by members of the security forces. No information has emerged as to her whereabouts.

According to unconfirmed reports from a Kurdish human rights organisation, enforcement agents tore the woman's clothing during a confrontation with her on the university campus. The student is then said to have stripped off her clothes in protest at the Islamic dress regulations. Pro-government media rejected this portrayal of events, claiming the woman suffers from mental problems and that the university security service handed the woman over to the police. Investigations into the incident are said to be ongoing.

Human rights organisations have called for the woman to be released immediately.⁷

Economic and social matters

A report by an Iranian news agency claims that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised its growth forecast for Iran for 2024. According to the report, gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to rise by 3.7 percentage points, as opposed to the 3.3 % increase forecast in July. It is forecast that the annual inflation rate will fall from 40.7 % in 2023 to 31.7 %, while the unemployment rate stands at around 8 %. Iranian media interpret these forecasts as indicating that the Iranian economy has recovered from the effects of the economic sanctions imposed by the USA in 2018, observing that the country's oil exports reached a record level in 2024.

In contrast, analysts outside of Iran expect a continuing negative course of development for Iran's economy, in particular in view of the rate of inflation for food and housing and the supply of water. The IMF's most recent report is seen by such analysts as indicating that economic growth has dropped from 5 % in 2023 to 3.7 % in 2024 and is expected to stand at only 2 % through to 2029. The IMF report also notes that a continuing energy crisis has had a severe impact on exports, and especially on steel, which represents one of the country's largest export commodities, along with oil. Oil exports to China reportedly accounted for a major share of Iran's entire economic output in 2023, but China's falling domestic demand for oil has also had a negative impact on Tehran's exports. The report observes that without this export revenue Iran will suffer even greater economic losses in future and its burden of debt will continue to increase.

According to reports in the media on 24.10.24, the country's poverty rate has remained constant at around 30 % over the past five years, with a slight rise of 0.4 percentage points in 2023 compared to the previous year, up to a rate of 30.1 %. This information is said to have emerged from a study by the Iranian parliament's research data centre. It is estimated that of a total population of 88,386,938 (as per 23.10.24), approx. 26 million are currently living below the poverty line. The continuing high inflation rate, which according to official figures stands at around 35 %, is seen as the prime reason for the constant poverty rate and growing social inequality. The major role played by oil exports as a growth factor is identified as another reason for the constant poverty rate (see above).⁸

Iraq

Elections in the autonomous Kurdistan Region (KR-I).

According to the final election result, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) emerged as the winner of the election, taking 39 of the 100 seats in the Kurdish regional parliament. The other traditional major party in the region, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), won 23 seats. This means that the next government will probably consist once again of a coalition of these two forces, which to all intents and purposes have shared power in the region since 1992. The largest opposition party, "New Generation", claimed only 15 seats.⁹

Lebanon

Armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah

The Israeli armed forces continue to carry out daily military operations against targets in Lebanon. Key focuses of the attacks continue to be southern Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley and the southern districts and suburbs of Beirut, although isolated attacks targeting individuals are also carried out in other regions. On 29.10.24 Naim Qassem was appointed as the new secretary general of Hezbollah, providing the terrorist organisation with an official leader once again.

The Israeli military continues to issue evacuation orders on a regular basis for regions in which ground operations are underway or in which large immobile targets are located. Major differences apply here with regard to the advance warning time provided.

A series of intense attacks was carried out on targets in the Beqaa Valley on 02.11.24, in the course of which at least 52 people were killed and 72 injured.

Also on 02.11.24, the Israeli military captured a high-ranking Hezbollah official by means of a naval landing operation. Around 25 Israeli soldiers are said to have abducted Imad Fadel Amhaz, whom the Israeli military describes as a leading member of Hezbollah's naval force. He was reportedly captured with the aim of obtaining information from him. Batroun is located on Lebanon's north coast and has a majority Christian population.

According to UNHCR, at least 472,000 people have fled to Syria, the vast majority of whom are Syrians, with minors making up a roughly 60 % share.

Due to the ongoing events, it is not possible to put an exact figure on the number of casualties at present. The death toll on the Lebanese side since 08.10.23 is currently estimated at 2,900 or more and at least 13,150 wounded, with adult men making up the overwhelming majority of casualties (approx. 75 %). No reliable figures are currently available with regard to the number of soldiers killed in the ongoing ground offensive, as both sides are largely maintaining silence about the course of events. The Israeli military puts the number of soldiers killed in the ground offensive to date at 38. In all, 63 Israelis are said to have been killed in the border region with Lebanon since the beginning of the conflict.¹⁰

Mozambique

Disturbances after elections

At least 13 people have reportedly been killed and 400 arrested in protests in Maputo since the official announcement of the election results (cf. BN of 14.10.24). Initial protests at the election result and irregularities in the electoral process, which were instigated by opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane, are said to have begun on 21.10.24. The police reportedly opened fire on Mondlane's supporters. It appears that access to social media has since been shut down and the internet has been intermittently blocked. Mondlane has called for further protests.¹¹

Niger

Jihadist attack near Niamey

By the group's own account, members of Jama'a Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), which is associated with Al Qaeda, attacked a military checkpoint in the Séno district near to the capital, Niamey, on 26.10.24, killing at least one member of the Nigerien military, seizing a number of weapons and setting military equipment on fire.

According to reports in the media, this attack was the closest to the Nigerian capital to be carried out by a jihadist group since the military assumed power in July 2023.¹²

Nigeria / Ghana

Human trafficking: Nigerian women liberated in Ghana

According to information released by the Nigerians in Diaspora

Commission (NiDCOM) on 27.10.24, members of the Ghanaian police unit for combating human trafficking working in cooperation with the Nigerian embassy in Accra have freed around 17 Nigerian women who were victims of human trafficking in the Ghanaian city of Tema and taken them back to Nigeria. According to reports in the media, the young women aged between 18 and 29 were lured with false promises of work, instead of which they ended up in exploitative situations. The rescued women from various Nigerian states, including Anambra, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Imo, Edo and Ebonyi, were reportedly handed over to the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). Five suspected human traffickers are said to have been arrested in the rescue operation. The Trafficking in Persons Report published in June 2024 by the U.S. Department of State reveals that Nigeria fails to meet minimum standards for combating human trafficking in full, but is continuing to make substantial efforts to do so. Announcements of successes by NAPTIP regularly state the number of victims of human trafficking freed in rescue operations and the number of people convicted of human trafficking (cf. BN of 25.07.22, 07.08. and 09.10.23, 01.07.24). Around 130 girls and women who were victims of human trafficking have reportedly been taken back from Ghana to Nigeria since July 2024.¹³

Pakistan

PTI demands release of ex-prime minister Khan; nationwide protests announced

Pakistan's largest opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has threatened nationwide protests to force the release of its imprisoned leader and ex-prime minister, Imran Khan. Ali Amin Gandapur, a high-ranking PTI member and chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, warned prime minister Shehbaz Sharif's government publicly, accusing the authorities of refusing Khan basic provisions and visiting rights, including access to his family, lawyers and medical care. Khan's sisters have corroborated these accusations. Khan himself is said to have posted a message in the social media in which he speaks of "psychological torture" and restricted access to his doctors and his family. As the first step in a nationwide mobilisation campaign, the PTI is planning a major demonstration in Peshawar.¹⁴

Security situation in Balochistan; nationwide spread of polio

At least nine people, including five pupils, were killed and 23 injured in a bomb attack near to a girls' school in Mastung, Balochistan province on 01.11.24. The attack was aimed at security forces who were escorting a polio vaccination team. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 01.11.24 the authorities reported two new cases of polio in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one from the Lakki Marwat district and one from D.I. Khan. This takes the total number of cases this year to 45. To date, 22 cases have been reported from Balochistan, twelve from Sindh, nine from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one case each from Punjab and Islamabad. In all, 76 districts are affected. Along with Afghanistan, Pakistan is one of the remaining countries in which polio is still endemic.

The attacks by separatist groups continue in Balochistan. On 29.10.24 five construction workers were killed in an attack for which the Balochistan Liberation Army has claimed responsibility. Prior to this, four people were injured in an explosion in Kala Saifullah on 24.10.24 and 20 miners were killed in an attack in Duki on 11.10.24.¹⁵

Palestinian territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

According to information released by the Hamas-run health ministry on 29.10.24, at least 43,061 Palestinians have been killed and 101,223 injured in the Gaza Strip since the war began. The ministry does not officially differentiate between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified. According to information released

by the Israeli military on 29.10.24, a total of 365 members of the Israeli military have been killed and 2,373 injured since the ground offensives began.

Against the backdrop of the ground offensive which is underway in the north of the Gaza Strip, it is reportedly almost impossible to bring relief supplies into the area. The Jabaliyya refugee camp is particularly severely affected. According to information from UN OCHA, seven incidents involving a high number of casualties occurred between 22.10. and 29.10.24, four of which took place in the north of the Gaza Strip.

88 people were killed in two Israeli air strikes on targets in Beit Lahiya, according to the local health ministry. More than 71,000 people are said to have fled the north of Gaza over the past three weeks, while some 100,000 people still remain there. By their own account, three hospitals in north Gaza can no longer attend to the large number of injured people. All three hospitals have been occupied and searched by the Israeli military in the past, because it was suspected that Hamas locations were located in or under the buildings.¹⁶

UNRWA: Israel passes laws to constrain the relief agency

On 28.10.24 the Israeli parliament passed two laws relating to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). One law prohibits the agency from carrying out any activities and from providing services on Israeli territory, including East Jerusalem, where the UNRWA headquarters are located. This law is to enter into force in three months. The second law prohibits official relations with the agency or its employees. Such relations were officially terminated on 04.11.24. As Israeli authorities and the military control access to both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, international monitors expect the legislation to have far-reaching consequences for UNRWA's ability to operate.

The Israeli government alleges that thousands of UNRWA's employees took part in the attacks of 07.10.23 and hundreds have links to militant organisations. It also claims that Hamas locations have been found under UNRWA facilities or in their direct vicinity. The agency has dismissed nine employees who have been named by Israel as having taken part in atrocities on 07.10.23.

UNRWA is considered to be the largest active aid organisation in the Gaza Strip. Israel's foreign minister Katz questions this, however, stating that only 13 % of aid deliveries are currently carried out by UNRWA.¹⁷

Republic of Moldova

Sandu wins presidential election

The incumbent, Maia Sandu of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), won the run-off against former prosecutor general Alexandr Stoianoglo from the Socialist Party (PSRM) on 03.11.24 (cf. BN of 28.10.24). Citing the central election commission (KEK), it has been reported in the media that with the results in from practically all polling sites, Sandu has won around 55 % of the vote.

Turnout reportedly stood at 54.3 %; almost 1.7 million eligible voters cast their votes, including over 300,000 people belonging to the Moldovan diaspora. It appears that Sandu's lead among the diaspora in the west and in the large cities was the crucial factor which decided the election.

Ahead of the run-off, the national anti-corruption authority (CNA) stated on 30.10.24 that it had imposed fines totalling over 2 million MDL (approx. EUR 102,700 as per 04.11.24) for electoral corruption. The penalty for passive electoral corruption stood at MDL 25,000 to 37,000 (approx. EUR 1,280 to 1,930). The "Victorie/Pobeda" political bloc of the fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor is said to have been behind the plan to buy votes. A series of searches and arrests have been reported, including on the premises of "Victorie/Pobeda" on 31.10.24. According to a report in the media on 02.11.24, the KEK has confirmed that it suspended employees at polling sites after receiving information from security agencies. The exertion of influence from outside the country and electoral corruption were already reported on in the first round of the presidential election and the EU referendum (cf. BN of 14.10. and 28.10.24).¹⁸

Constitutional referendum on accession to EU ratified

On 31.10.24 the constitutional court validated the result of the EU referendum, which took place in parallel with the first round of the presidential election. The "Yes" camp on enshrining accession to the EU in the constitution as a national goal claimed a narrow majority on 20.10.24, taking around 50.4 % of the vote, which corresponded to a

lead of just over 10,000 votes (cf. BN of 28.10.24). The corresponding bill was passed while the referendum was still in progress, enabling the amendment to the constitution to be promulgated in the official gazette. It has been reported that members of the Communist party (PCRM), including the former president of Moldova, Vladimir Voronin, protested outside the constitutional court prior to the announcement of the ruling. In addition, MPs associated with Ilan Shor reportedly attempted to convince the court that breaches of the rules had occurred in connection with the organisation of the referendum, with the intention of persuading the court not to ratify the referendum result.¹⁹

Senegal

Unrest ahead of parliamentary elections

On 28.10.24 unknown actors destroyed the campaign headquarters of Barthélémy Dias – opposition party Sàmm Sa Kàddu's leading candidate and the mayor of the capital, Dakar. The incident occurred during campaigning for the early parliamentary elections on 17.11.24. Members of the opposition party believe that the attack was carried out by supporters of the governing party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF).

On 30.10.24 unknown actors attacked the convoy of the prime minister, Ousmane Sonko of the PASTEF party, in the town of Koungeul (Kaffrine region) while he was on his way to campaign rallies in the centre of the country. According to reports in the media, several members of the Grand Parti (GP) who were accompanying him were injured in the attack. GP is a party allied with Sonko. Sonko himself is reported to have remained unscathed.²⁰

Sudan

Fighting continues

Mid-October once again witnessed heavy fighting between the Sudanese army (SAF) and the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the Gezira region. RSF attacks on a number of villages and small towns reportedly left 120 people dead, 200 injured and drove up to 47,000 people from their homes. The UN Security Council suspects that war crimes may have been perpetrated. The attacks are also said to have entailed serious sexual violence, including rape, abductions in particular of women and girls and looting. According to reports in the media, the heavy fighting was sparked by RSF commander Abu Aqla Keikel's defection to the Sudanese army, together with a number of troop units.

Almost 25,000 people are said to have been killed and over 11 million people driven from their homes since the conflict broke out in April 2023.²¹

Syria

Refugees from Lebanon

According to the most recent estimates released by the UNHCR on 01.11.24, some 473,000 people are believed to have fled to Syria since the beginning of the war in Lebanon. 71 % of these refugees are said to be Syrians, with Lebanese and third-country nationals making up the rest. According to the UNHCR, women and children account for more than 80 % of the households which have fled Lebanon.

UNRWA in Syria has reported that as per 27.10.24 a total of 904 Palestinians who had fled Lebanon had turned to the refugee relief agency. This corresponds to an estimated 4,500 people, although the UN relief agency assumes that the actual numbers of Palestinian families to have fled to Syria are substantially higher. A poll covering 733 of these households revealed that around 56 % had previously lived in Syria and had fled the country during the civil war.

Some 7,500 people are said to have sought refuge in north-west Syria, although the inner-Syrian border crossings to the north-west have reportedly been closed to people from Lebanon for a number of weeks now.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) recorded the arrest by government troops of 25 Syrian men and one Syrian woman entering the country from Lebanon between 23.09. and 25.10.24. According to the SNHR, the majority of those taken into custody originate from territories which are not fully under government control (Idlib,

Deir ez-Zor, Suweida). The network stresses that on account of methodical and logistical constraints and security considerations the stated figures only represent a minimum estimate of the actual number of such cases. According to estimates contained in the report, around 23,400 Syrians have travelled to areas outside of government control. Based on interviews with family members, HRW has documented the arrests of five Syrians from Lebanon in the course of October.²²

North-west: Bombardment by government troops

According to reports in the media, the Syrian military has continued its bombardment of targets in north-west Syria with artillery fire and missiles, as well as so-called kamikaze drones. No reliable figures are available regarding the number of people killed and injured. Parts of the population having fled their homes as a result of the military escalation in recent weeks (cf. BN of 21.10.24) and some of these having since returned to their homes, 1,843 have now once again fled their homes close to the inner-Syrian front.²³

Central Syria: US air strikes

US Central Command announced on 30.10.24 that air strikes carried out two days previously on targets linked to IS in central system had killed 35 members of the extremist group. There have apparently been no reports of any civilians coming to harm.²⁴

North-east: Bombardment by Turkish military

Following sustained Turkish air strikes on targets in the Kurdish-run north-east of Syria (cf. BN of 28.10.24), at least 18 people were killed and 60 injured in the period up to 29.10.24.

According to information from the military council of Manbij, 689 Turkish projectiles were fired at the area around Manbij alone in the course of October, including artillery shells, mortar shells and drones. Two fighters have reportedly been killed in the area, three civilians have been killed and eleven wounded. According to its own account, the military council launched a counter-offensive involving operations against seven Turkish military bases, in the course of which 17 members of the Turkish military and ten fighters of Turkey-backed militias were allegedly killed and 21 injured. These figures have yet to be confirmed by the Turkish military, however, and no independent verification has been possible.²⁵

Türkiye

Four CHP and DEM mayors dismissed

According to reports in the media, two mayors elected in this year's local elections in cities in the south-east of Türkiye (Mardin, Batman and Halfeti, an administrative district in Şanlıurfa province) and a mayoress belonging to the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) were dismissed from office by the government on 04.11.24 and replaced by trustees. According to the interior ministry, they are suspected of terrorism.

Prior to this, it emerges from reports in the press that Ahmet Özer, who represented the Republican People's Party (CHP) as the mayor of the Istanbul borough of Esenyurt, was arrested at his home on 30.10.24 and replaced by a trustee. Özer was also elected in the local election on 31.03.24. He is accused by the public prosecutor's office of being a member of the PKK. He has allegedly had links to the PKK and to leading PKK members for almost a decade. The evidence against him is said to include surveillance recordings and financial transactions.

Both the CHP and the DEM, which has described Özer's arrest as a "political coup", protested against the mayor's arrest, which they consider to be politically motivated.²⁶

Tunisia

Influencer sentenced to prison term

It has been reported in the press that TikTok user Choumoukh was sentenced at first instance to a prison term of four years and six months on 31.10.24. She was found guilty on five counts, including "wilful harassment" and "propagation of immoral content". Contrary to customary practice, instead of handing down a summary sentence for all the charges, each charge was heard and judged separately in court. Neither the influencer's age of 24 nor her clean police record to date were taken into consideration.

The ministry of justice announced on 27.10.24 that it would prosecute anyone who disseminated content which was in breach of moral values and ethicality. A number of the most prominent creators of content on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have reportedly received summonses and arrest warrants have been issued in some instances.²⁷

Ukraine

Civilian casualties and accusations of torture

According to information from the governor, one person was killed by a drone attack in the Kherson region on 28.10.24. The authorities report that one person died on the same day in Kryvyi Rih as a result of a Russian missile attack. According to information from local authorities, four people died in a Russian bomb attack on the city of Kharkiv on 29.10.24. Three people, including two minors, were killed in an attack on a residential building on 30.10.24.

It was reported in the media on 01.11.24 that a UN-backed commission investigating human rights violations by the Russian side in Ukraine has established that torture crimes have been committed against civilians in all territories under Russian control. The commission has reportedly also ascertained that Ukrainian prisoners of war have been subjected to body searches, long periods without any clothing and sexual violence.²⁸

Course of the war and recruitment

According to reports in the media, in September 2024 the Russian armed forces advanced more quickly in Ukraine than in any month since March 2022. From 20.10. to 27.10.24 they gained the largest amount of territory in the space of one week since the beginning of 2024. Citing information from the Russian defence ministry, it was reported on 29.10.24 that the cities of Selydove and Hirnyk (Donetsk region) had been captured, as a result of which Russian troops were now advancing further towards the important cities of Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. The Ukrainian military describes the situation at these two sections of the front as "particularly tense".

It has been reported in the media that the Ukrainian parliament has extended martial law and mobilisation by a further 90 days. In connection with this measure, the secretary of the National Security Council, Oleksandr Lytvynenko, has announced the intention to call up a further 160,000 draftees for military service.²⁹

Deployment of North Korean troops close to Ukrainian border

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte stated on 28.10.24 that the South Korean secret service had shared evidence with NATO representatives indicating that North Korean units have been deployed in the Russian region of Kursk, which borders on Ukraine. The US Defense Department had previously reported that some 10,000 North Korean soldiers had been dispatched to support Russian troops in territories "close to Ukraine", including 8,000 in the Kursk region. The Russian Federation does not deny that North Korean units are being deployed. North Korea describes the deployment as being "in compliance with international law." While the USA and South Korea have called for the troops to be withdrawn, Ukraine's president Zelenskyy expressed disappointment at his allies' "zero response."³⁰

Sentencing by Russian judiciary in Crimea

According to reports in the media on 01.11.24, the Russian judiciary has sentenced two men in occupied Crimea to 14 and 16 years respectively in a penal colony under "harsh conditions" for working as agents for the Ukrainian secret service, SBU.³¹

Venezuela

Report by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela (IIFFM)

The main focus of the IIFFM's Conference Room Paper published on 14.10.24 for the reporting period from 01.09.23 to 31.08.24 is on state repression in connection with the presidential elections on 28.07.24. 19 individual cases are cited in this context. While in the run-up to the elections repressive measures and largely arbitrary arrests for the most part selectively targeted leading figures from the political opposition (first and foremost Vente Venezuela members, but also members of other parties) and civil society (human rights defenders, NGO staff, media

representatives) as well as members of the military, the report notes that repressive acts and arrests recorded after the presidential elections were less selective and more widespread. The report also addresses state security operations in connection with alleged conspiracies (e.g. operation Brazalete Blanco) ahead of the elections, observing that since 2014 the government has continually used such allegations to justify actions against opposition figures. In addition, individual cases have been documented in which detainees have been coerced into accusing other people of involvement in conspiracies. The report expresses particular concern at a pattern of arrests of minors in the aftermath of the elections, some of whom have been accused of serious crimes such as terrorism. In the examined cases, arrests after the elections have reportedly always taken place without an arrest warrant and numerous collective trials have been carried out without procedural safeguards. According to the report, enforced disappearance has become established as a "common instrument of repression against actual or suspected opponents of the government." Many arrests are also reported to have taken place by way of denunciation, e.g. via the government's VenApp. The IIFFM has further identified cases of torture and cruel treatment or punishment at the Rodeo I prison in Miranda, among other institutions, and cases of sexualised or gender-based violence against female prisoners, as well as female visitors to prisons. In addition to the personal profiles targeted for arrests in the run-up to the elections, in the aftermath of the elections arrests additionally focused primarily on young men from low-income urban districts (so-called zonas populares), as well as individual cases involving lawyers representing prisoners and employees of security services and the judiciary who have refused, for example, to suppress protests, to issue arrest warrants or to bring charges against protesters. Other isolated cases involved minors, students and indigenous people. Most of the arrests after the elections reportedly took place either at or in the vicinity of protests on the first days after the elections, as a consequence of participation in protests and in the course of the so-called Tun Tun security operation. The IIFFM has further received information about isolated forcible arrests of minors and cases of (attempted) forced confessions via (threats of) violence or promises of shorter prison sentences. In the aftermath of the elections, increasing numbers of arrests have been recorded for posting anti-government comments in social media or Messenger apps, on charges of inciting hate. After the elections, complaints and habeas corpus requests from the authorities (e.g. public prosecutor's office, national ombudsman's office) have been largely ignored or shelved.

It has not yet been possible to investigate the responsibility for the deaths in conjunction with the protests in accordance with the IIFFM's methodology.

The IIFFM report concludes with the observation that the numerous examined cases and actions indicate that the government's systematic and widespread policy of repression is continuing and that there are adequate grounds to assume that the government in Venezuela is continuing to commit crimes against humanity for political reasons, including against actual or suspected opponents of the government.³²

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Briefing Notes

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Imprint

Published by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge,
90461 Nürnberg

ISSN

2943-0690

Valid as of

CW 45/2024

Printed by

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Design

Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge

Reference source

Publikationsstelle Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
www.bamf.de/publikationen

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