



HUMAN RIGHTS IN TURKEY:

2023 in Review



About the Stockholm Center for Freedom

The Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF) is a non-profit advocacy organization that promotes the rule of law, democracy and human rights with a special focus on Turkey.

SCF was set up by a group of journalists who were forced to live in self-exile in Sweden against the backdrop of a massive crackdown on press freedom in Turkey.

SCF is committed to serving as a reference source by providing a broader picture of rights violations in Turkey, monitoring daily developments, documenting individual cases of the infringement of fundamental rights and publishing comprehensive reports on human rights issues.

SCF is a member of the Alliance Against Genocide, an international coalition dedicated to creating the international institutions and the political will to prevent genocide

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1. Introduction

The May 2023 re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the victory of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in parliamentary elections consolidated his authoritarian rule in Turkey and increased pressure on perceived critics and political opponents. The increasing repression of the Kurdish political movement, the crackdown on the Gülen movement, new methods of transnational repression, the arrest of journalists and deteriorating press freedom, the spread of hate speech and hate crimes targeting ethnic and religious minorities and refugees, systematic torture and ill-treatment and an increase in rights violations against women were the defining topics of this year as in previous years.

Turkey was ranked 117th among 140 countries in the rule of law index published by the [World Justice Project](#) in October. The country ranked 137th in terms of constraints on government powers and 133rd in terms of fundamental rights. Turkey was last in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia group, ranking worse than Russia, in the overall index score, fundamental rights and civil justice. In the global ranking, Turkey came after Angola and Mexico and above Guinea and Honduras.

According to the [2023 statistics](#) announced by Síofra O'Leary, president of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Turkey topped the list of countries with cases awaiting judgment with 23,397 applications, corresponding to 34.2 percent of the total. It was followed by the Russian Federation, with 12,453 applications; Ukraine (8,737); Romania (4,171); and Italy, with 2,743 applications pending. Complaints related to arrests, prosecutions and dismissals in the public sector following a coup attempt in July, 2016 made up half the applications against Turkey.

A law firm and two nongovernmental organizations advocating human rights and the rule of law [sent](#) a communication to the International Criminal Court (ICC) seeking the launch of an investigation into the Turkish government due to crimes allegedly committed by government officials against opponents.

In addition, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [concluded](#) that the arrest and detention of an individual with alleged ties to the faith-based Gülen movement was arbitrary and said such cases may constitute crimes against humanity. According to figures released by Turkish Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunç, a total of 122,632 people have been [jailed](#) over alleged links to the movement since 2016 and 15,539 are still behind bars as part of the crackdown on the group.

The Grand Chamber of the ECtHR [ruled](#) in late September that Turkish courts' conviction of Yüksel Yalçınkaya, a teacher, of terrorism due to activities such as the use of a mobile phone application or having an account at a certain bank was unlawful, in a decision that could have far-reaching implications for thousands facing similar charges in Turkey. The court faulted Turkey due to

violations of three articles of the Convention on Human Rights: Article 6, which concerns the right to a fair trial; Article 7 on no punishment without law; and Article 11 on freedom of assembly and association.

According to [Freedom House](#), Turkey remained “not free” with a score of 30/100 in 2023. The right group’s [yearly report](#) revealed that Turkey has steadily declined over the past decade and referred to Turkey’s new “disinformation law” as contributing to the declining internet freedoms in the country. Jack Dorsey, co-founder of the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, [revealed](#) in a YouTube interview that Turkey had constantly threatened to shut down the platform unless it complied with orders to restrict accounts.

In its [2023 Report](#) on Turkey, the European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, said there were “serious deficiencies” in the functioning of Turkey’s democratic institutions, underlining continuing democratic backsliding and structural deficiencies in the presidential system. The country’s constitutional architecture kept powers centralized at the level of the presidency, failing to ensure a sound and effective separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, the EU report stated.

In June the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in its first [resolution](#) condemning all forms of transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights revealed the tactics of countries including Turkey to suppress their critics abroad. According to the resolution, the Turkish government’s tactics rely on “renditions, abuse of extradition proceedings, Interpol Red Notices, anti-terror financing measures, and co-opting other States to deport or transfer persons unlawfully.”

Turkish courts continued to systematically accept bogus indictments, convicting without compelling evidence of criminal activity individuals and groups the Erdoğan government regarded as political opponents. Among them were journalists, opposition politicians, activists and human rights defenders.

Turkey was among the top jailers of journalists in the 2023 prison [census](#) of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and a global leader in terms of legal harassment of female journalists in a report [released](#) by the Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ). Media outlets critical of the government were frequently sanctioned over political comments made on the air or news coverage that deviated from the official narrative. Not surprisingly, Turkey [fell](#) dramatically in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2023 World Press Freedom Index, slipping 16 places and ranking 165th among 180 countries, not far from North Korea, which occupies the bottom of the list.

Dozens of people were mistreated by security officers in provinces of southern Turkey that were hit by devastating earthquakes in early February, and three inmates died in post-quake prison riots. According to local reports, an individual was beaten to death by members of the Altınözü gendarmerie unit in Hatay province.

President Erdoğan, his far-right ally Devlet Bahçeli and other government officials adopted an ultranationalist rhetoric that equated Kurdish political dissent and assertive expression of Kurdish identity to terrorism, while some segments of the opposition fueled a growing anti-migrant sentiment among the public, jeopardizing the safety of the country's sizeable refugee community.

Turkey's religious minorities continued their legal struggle for property rights, while the LGBT community became the target of the ruling party and its allies, who used them as a talking point in an effort to consolidate their voter base during the general election in May. The authorities also imposed restrictions on Pride Week events in June, citing "protection of the family."

2. Crackdown on the Gülen movement

The Gülen movement is a worldwide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric resident in the US. The movement focuses on diverse service projects that are initiated, funded and conducted by people who are motivated by Gülen's humanitarian discourse.

President Erdoğan has been targeting followers of the movement since the corruption investigations of December 17-25, 2013, which implicated then-prime minister Erdoğan, his family members and his inner circle.

Dismissing the investigations as a Gülenist coup and conspiracy against his government, Erdoğan designated the movement as a terrorist organization and began to target its members. He locked up thousands, including many prosecutors, judges and police officers involved in the investigations.

Some of the claims that were part of the corruption investigations were later [substantiated](#) in New York federal court, where Turkish banker Mehmet Hakan Atilla was sentenced to 32 months for conspiring to violate US sanctions on Iran and other offenses.

Erdoğan intensified the crackdown on the movement following a coup attempt on July 15, 2016 that he accused Gülen of masterminding. Gülen and the movement strongly deny involvement in the abortive putsch or any terrorist activity.

Following the failed coup the Turkish government carried out a massive purge of state institutions under the pretext of an anti-coup fight. More than 130,000 public servants, including 4,156 judges and prosecutors, as well as 24,706 members of the armed forces were summarily removed from their jobs for alleged membership in or relationships with "terrorist organizations" by emergency decree-laws subject to neither judicial nor parliamentary scrutiny.

Such daily activities as having an account at or depositing money in a Gülen movement-affiliated bank, working at any institution linked to the movement or subscribing to certain newspapers and magazines were accepted as benchmarks for identifying and arresting alleged members of the movement.

The Grand Chamber of the ECtHR [ruled](#) in late September that Turkish courts' conviction of Yüksel Yalçınkaya, a teacher, of terrorism due to activities such as the use of a mobile phone application or having an account at a certain bank was unlawful, in a decision that could have far-reaching implications for thousands facing similar charges in Turkey. The court faulted Turkey due to violations of three articles of the Convention on Human Rights: Article 6, which concerns the right to a fair trial; Article 7 on no punishment without law; and Article 11 on freedom of assembly and association.

According to the Justice Ministry, a total of 117,208 people have been convicted, while more than 600,000 have been the subject of investigation in Turkey due to alleged links to the Gülen movement since the coup attempt. Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunç earlier said 15,539 people are still behind bars over alleged Gülen links.

Ali Babacan, leader of the opposition Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) and a former heavyweight of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), has [claimed](#) that President Erdoğan ordered officials to “show no mercy” in the government crackdown following the failed coup and to not be concerned about separating the guilty from the innocent.

During the year Erdoğan continued to relentlessly pursue anyone with alleged links to the movement. They have been targets of hate speech, hate crimes, unlawful prosecution, torture and abductions, among other serious human rights violations.

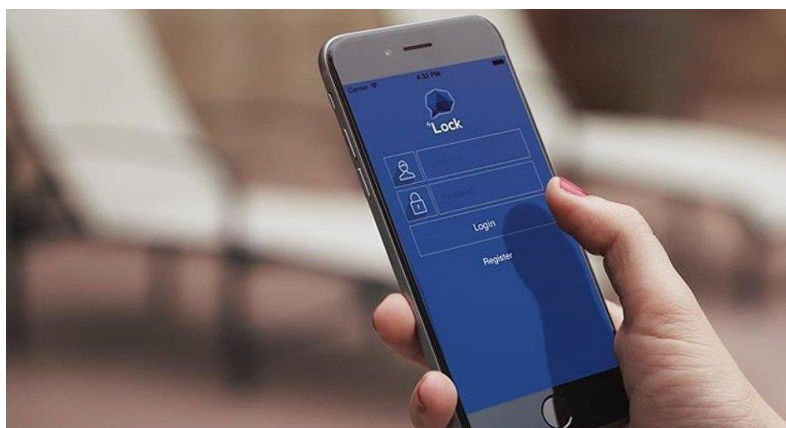
Here is some of the most important news from 2023 concerning Erdoğan’s crackdown on the Gülen movement:

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Decisions and reports by international organizations and foreign governments

UK Home Office report highlighted persecution of Gülen movement in Turkey

The United Kingdom Home Office released an update on its Country Policy and Information Note on the Gülen movement in Turkey, which detailed widespread rights violations suffered in the country by members of the group since a coup attempt in July 2016. [More...](#)



ECtHR notified Turkey of 1,000 applications over Gülen movement convictions after landmark ruling

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) notified Ankara of 1,000 applications in its docket for convictions of Gülen movement membership over the use of the ByLock

smartphone application, following a landmark ruling in September that found the use of the application not to constitute a reliable piece of evidence or a criminal offense. [More...](#)

Widespread imprisonment of individuals with alleged Gülen links may constitute crimes against humanity: UN working group

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) said in a decision that the arrest and detention of an individual with alleged ties to the Gülen movement was arbitrary and said such cases may constitute crimes against humanity. [More...](#)

ECtHR faulted Turkey for pretrial detention of 45 people over Gülen links

The ECtHR faulted Turkey over the arrest and pretrial detention of 45 individuals in the aftermath of a coup attempt in 2016 on suspicion of membership in the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

ECtHR faulted Turkey for pretrial detention of 366 people over Gülen links

The ECtHR once again faulted Turkey over the arrest and pretrial detention of 366 people following a failed coup in Turkey in 2016 due to their alleged links to the Gülen movement, finding an absence of sufficient grounds for their detention. [More...](#)

Ongoing purge

Turkey's top court found rights violation in man's dismissal due to spouse's alleged ties to Gülen movement

Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled that the firing of a man due to his wife's alleged links to the Gülen movement violated his right to respect for private and family life. [More...](#)

Turkey's intelligence agency confirmed abduction of more than 100 people with alleged links to Gülen movement

Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT) confirmed in its yearly report that it had conducted operations for the forcible return of more than 100 people with alleged links to the Gülen movement. "... [M]ore than 100 members of the [Gülen movement] from different countries were brought to Turkey as a result of the [agency's] increased operational capacity abroad," MİT's 2022 report said. [More...](#)

Opposition MP admitted post-coup purge of bureaucrats carried out with no solid evidence

An opposition lawmaker who was a member of a commission formed to investigate an attempted coup in 2016 said a post-coup purge of members of Turkey's bureaucracy and police force was not due to concrete evidence but rather was based on which minister was in office when they were hired. [More...](#)



Former teacher convicted of links to the Gülen movement denied parole despite eligibility

Former history teacher Seyit Ahmet Aydın was sentenced to more than nine years in prison for alleged links to the Gülen movement. He was kept in western Turkey's Manisa Akhisar Prison. Aydın's wife said in a video posted on social media that her husband was kept in prison despite meeting all the criteria for parole. [More...](#)

Turkey intensified crackdown on Gülen movement, ordered detention of 73 in 2 days

Prosecutors intensified Turkey's crackdown on the Gülen movement and in two days ordered the detention of 73 people due to alleged links to the movement. [More...](#)

Crackdown on Gülen movement continued with dozens of detentions

The crackdown on members of the Gülen movement continued with the detention of 43 people following President Erdoğan's victory in the presidential election, extending his 20-year rule until 2028. [More...](#)

Turkey escalated mass detentions in new wave of crackdowns on Gülen movement

Turkey escalated the mass detention of people over alleged links to the Gülen movement, ordering the detention of 69 individuals in a wave of crackdowns on the movement. [More...](#)



Exhibit in former Gestapo prison exposed extent of purge in Turkey

The Purge Museum (Tenkil Müzesi in Turkish), an initiative that collects and exhibits items belonging to individuals who survived Turkey's massive crackdown on the Gülen movement,

opened an exhibit in Germany's historic Klapperfeld Prison, which was also used by the Gestapo. [More...](#)

Disabled teacher arrested in nationwide operation against Gülen movement

Former history teacher Mustafa Seçkin, who is almost totally blind, was arrested in eastern Turkey's Elazığ province after being detained on October 24. His arrest was made public on Monday by his daughter Irem Seçkin, who said her father was interrogated about a social media post. [More...](#)

Turkish courts began ordering compensation for reinstated purge victims following top court order

Courts in Turkey began to order the state to pay damages to purge victims who were reinstated to their positions after they were summarily dismissed in the aftermath of a failed coup in July 2016. The decisions started after the Constitutional Court annulled a provision that excluded monetary compensation to reinstated public sector workers. [More...](#)

Director of film about Turkey's purge victims received award for defying gov't censorship

Nejla Demirci, the director of a documentary that shed light on the challenges faced by victims of Turkey's post-coup purge, was honored with an award by the Contemporary Journalists Association (ÇGD) for her defiance in the face of government efforts to censor her work. [More...](#)



Disabled former judge sent to prison to serve sentence on conviction of Gülen links

Turkish authorities arrested and sent to prison Mustafa Şener, a former judge suffering from severe visual impairment who was sentenced to prison on conviction of links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Turkey blacklisted 411 critics living abroad over Gülen links

The Turkish government blacklisted 411 people living in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, the US and Canada for alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Nine newly graduated lawyers detained over Gülen links in İstanbul-based operation

Nine lawyers who recently graduated from law school were detained in an İstanbul-based operation targeting alleged followers of the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

22 detained in northern Turkey over Gülen links, books presented as 'criminal evidence'

Turkish police detained 22 people in two provinces in northern Turkey over their alleged links to the Gülen movement and presented books authored by Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen as "criminal evidence." [More...](#)



Disabled 86-year-old hospitalized soon after being imprisoned over Gülen links

An elderly man who is almost totally disabled was hospitalized soon after being sent to prison to serve his 10-year sentence over links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Man imprisoned on Gülen links to spend 10 more months behind bars for making prayer beads

İsmet Özçelik, incarcerated on conviction of links to the Gülen movement, was sentenced to 10 months extra imprisonment for making prayer beads out of olive pits. [More...](#)

Turkish academic on Stanford list of top scientists revealed to be serving sentence on Gülen links

A Turkish endocrinology and metabolism expert who was included on Stanford University's World's Top 2% Scientists' List in 2020, 2021 and 2022 was revealed to be serving a sentence on conviction of links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)



Ailing man sent to prison to serve sentence on conviction of Gülen links

Ahmet Öztürk, an ailing elderly man was arrested and sent to prison to serve a six-year, three-month sentence on conviction of links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Turkey suspended 445 police officers for suspected Gülen links

Turkey's Interior Ministry suspended 445 police officers working for the Security Directorate General (EGM) due to suspected links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Inmate convicted of Gülen links not allowed to attend funerals of wife, children who died in quakes

Ebubekir Ertuğrul, a prisoner convicted of alleged links to the Gülen movement, was not allowed to attend the funerals of his wife and two children, who died in devastating earthquakes in southern Turkey on February 6. [More...](#)

Top court found rights violation in terror conviction of teacher in Gülen-linked case

The Constitutional Court ruled that the conviction of a teacher on terrorism charges over his alleged links to the Gülen movement violated his rights. [More...](#)

Hate speech and discrimination

State-owned bank continued declining applications for earthquake assistance loan submitted by post-coup purge victims

Turkish state-owned Vakıfbank continued to decline applications filed by individuals who were fired from the civil service following a July 15, 2016 coup

attempt for a loan that is being offered to people displaced by deadly earthquakes in southern Turkey in early February. [More...](#)



Former Erdoğan aide said hatred of Gülen movement should be rekindled

Pro-government Yeni Şafak daily columnist Aydın Ünal, previously a speechwriter for Erdoğan as well as a former lawmaker from his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), discussed in a

column how Turkey's fight against members of the movement, which he described as the "Fetö terrorist organization," was going as the seventh anniversary of the coup attempt approached. Ünal said although the Gülen movement was dealt a heavy blow in Turkey, with many of its followers jailed, that those still at large were under close scrutiny, that the crackdown on the movement had not yet been completed and that there were big risks in this. [More...](#)

RTÜK suspended Turkish TV station for hosting former football star sought on Gülen links

Turkey's broadcasting watchdog RTÜK ordered a suspension of three episodes of a TV program for hosting former national football player Hakan Şükür, who is sought by the Turkish government due to his links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Torture and inhuman treatment

Opposition party vice chair acknowledged systematic torture of supporters of the Gülen movement

Ahmet Zeki Üçok, vice chair of the nationalist opposition İYİ (Good) Party, after a visit to two imprisoned journalists, said they faced torture that was not even meted out to Gülenists in the past, acknowledging that alleged members of the Gülen movement faced widespread torture in custody. [More...](#)

Children of the purge: death, disease and separation

More children separated from parents as Turkish government's crackdown on Gülen movement continued

Two more children were left to the care of a relative due to the incarceration of their parents for alleged links to the Gülen movement. Housewife Mihriban Külüs was arrested to serve a sentence for Gülen links, leaving her children ages 6 and 12 to the care of their aunt. Külüs's husband, Emrah Külüs, has been in prison for the last seven years on similar charges. [More...](#)

Parents of critically ill teen were detained in nationwide police operation that targeted Gülen movement

The parents of 17-year-old Azra Ağır, who suffers from Joubert Syndrome, a rare genetic condition that causes abnormal brain development, were detained in two different



provinces, Gaziantep and Kırşehir. The news was announced by Ağır on social media, who called for prayers from her followers. [More...](#)

Turkish authorities' arrest of parents for alleged Gülen links financially and mentally wore down caregiver of 2 children

The grandmother of two children who were left without parents after both their mother and father were arrested for alleged links to the Gülen movement said the last five years have been extremely difficult. [More...](#)

Turkish court sent parents of 6 to prison on Gülen charges conviction

A Turkish family was arrested and sent to prison to serve sentences for conviction of links to the Gülen movement, leaving their six children in the care of relatives. [More...](#)

6-year-old boy accompanying mother in prison released without mother, sparking concern over well-being

A 6-year-old boy who has accompanied his mother in prison since infancy was entrusted to the care of relatives while his mother and father remained in prison, sparking concern over his well-being. [More...](#)



Child whose mother was imprisoned over Gülen links succumbed to bone cancer

Yusuf Kerim Sayın, a child with bone cancer who made the headlines with a video of him crying and asking for his imprisoned mother posted on social media, passed away. [More...](#)

Story of lawyer jailed on Gülen links exposed plight of children accompanying their mothers in Turkey's prisons

The story of Özge Elif Hendekci, a lawyer who was previously imprisoned in Turkey along with her child on charges of links to the Gülen movement, highlighted the notoriously unfavorable conditions for children accompanying their mothers behind bars. [More...](#)

Arrest of pregnant women and mothers with infants

2 children accompanied mother serving prison sentence on conviction of links to Gülen movement

Two children, aged 2 and 4 years, accompanied their mother, Serpil Turan, in prison following her arrest on January 5 to serve a sentence for conviction of links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)



2 children accompanied mother in prison serving sentence on conviction of link to Gülen movement

Zehre Gürsoy, a mother of four who was arrested on January 30 in the western Turkish province of Edirne to serve a sentence on conviction of "terrorist organization membership," was accompanied by two of her children in prison. [More...](#)

Documentary series shed light on plight of child victims of Turkey's purge

The Tenkil Museum, a civil initiative dedicated to sustaining the memory of the victims of Turkey's massive crackdown on the Gülen movement, launched a documentary series focused on the suffering of child victims caught up in the persecution. [More...](#)



Turkey continued jailing mothers with babies as part of crackdown on Gülen movement

Turkish authorities continued jailing mothers with their babies as part of a crackdown on alleged members of the Gülen movement despite a law requiring the postponement of prison sentences for

women who are pregnant or have given birth in the last 18 months. Şadinaz Yaşa Yılmaz, the mother of a 10-month-old infant, was sent to prison over alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Parents of 3-month-old infant arrested on Gülen conviction, sparking public outrage

The parents of a 3-month-old infant were arrested and sent to prison to serve sentences on conviction of Gülen links, leaving their baby to the care of relatives. [More...](#)

Mother of two-and-a-half-month-old baby sent to prison in violation of the law

Hilal Keser, the mother of a two-and-a-half-month-old infant, was sent to prison in violation of a law that requires the postponement of the execution of prison sentences for women who are pregnant or have given birth within the last year and a half. [More...](#)



7-months-pregnant woman imprisoned in northwestern Turkey

Hatice Avuloğlu, 34, was held in an Edirne prison since despite being seven months pregnant. [More...](#)

Former teacher accompanied by 3-year-old daughter sent to prison to serve sentence on conviction of Gülen links

Sevilay Albayrak, a former teacher previously sentenced to seven years, six months in prison for her links to the Gülen movement, was arrested and sent to prison to serve her time after her conviction was upheld by the Supreme Court of Appeals. [More...](#)

Poor prison conditions forced new mother serving sentence on conviction of Gülen links to give baby to relatives

A woman arrested to serve a prison sentence for conviction of links to the Gülen movement was forced to hand over her 13-month-old baby to relatives because the prison could not accommodate his needs. [More...](#)

3-month-old baby accompanied mother serving sentence for alleged Gülen links

Emine Coşkun, who was arrested in İstanbul to serve a sentence for conviction of links to the Gülen movement, was reportedly being accompanied by her 3-month-old daughter in prison. [More...](#)

Ailing prisoners denied proper care

Father of 2 convicted of Gülen links denied release from prison despite cancer diagnosis

A father of two, convicted of alleged links to the Gülen movement in August 2021, was denied release from prison despite suffering from cancer. [More...](#)



Seriously ill 63-year-old kept behind bars on Gülen links

Ramazan Taşkiran, a 63-year-old man suffering from severe kidney disease and disabilities, was being held in prison on conviction of links to the Gülen movement, despite having to undergo dialysis on a regular basis.

[More...](#)

Property rights



Top court found rights violation in blocking of Bank Asya customer's funds

In a landmark decision Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of an applicant who claimed she was blocked from withdrawing money from her account at the now-closed Islamic lender Bank Asya on suspicion of

membership in the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Deaths of purge victims

Purge victim succumbed to cancer without saying goodbye to her jailed husband

Nursel Ekici, 48, a former teacher who was fired by an emergency decree as part of Turkey's post-coup purge of state institutions, died of cancer



without being able to see her imprisoned husband. Her husband, Mustafa, another purge victim and a former teacher, was jailed over alleged links to the Gülen movement. He was not released from prison despite the fact that he has been eligible for parole since March 8. [More...](#)

2 members of family killed in traffic accident while driving to visit jailed purge victim

Two members of the Karahanlı family were killed in a traffic accident while driving to Turkey's central province of Kırıkkale to visit Uğur Karahanlı, who was jailed over alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)



Purge victim forced to work as a deliveryman died in traffic accident

İbrahim Saygı, a former official who was dismissed from Turkey's Justice Ministry by a government decree as part of purges that followed a July 15, 2016 coup attempt, died in a traffic accident while working as a deliveryman in the western Turkish province of Manisa. [More...](#)

Purge victim died after heart attack in Turkish prison

Bayram Tekin, a former police officer who was fired by a government decree as part of purges that followed a 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and subsequently jailed, died after a heart attack in Ankara's Sincan Prison. [More...](#)

Doctor imprisoned on Gülen charges died of cancer after belated release

Ahmet Rıza Özkan, 42, a doctor imprisoned over his alleged links to the Gülen movement, died of cancer after he was released well after the cancer had advanced. [More..](#)

Son of police officer sacked for alleged Gülen links died by suicide

Mehmet Reşat Erçakır, whose police officer father was dismissed by an emergency decree for alleged links to the Gülen movement, died by suicide. [More...](#)

Teacher jailed on Gülen links died of heart failure after medical release

Mehmet Burhan, a teacher who was serving a sentence on conviction of links to the Gülen movement, died of heart failure two months after he was released for medical reasons. [More...](#)

Former combat pilot fired over alleged Gülen links died in work-related accident

A former combat pilot who was fired by an emergency decree for alleged links to the Gülen movement was killed in a work-related accident. [More...](#)

Turkish man belatedly released from prison despite advanced cancer died

A father of two who was belatedly released from prison despite suffering from advanced cancer succumbed to his illness.

[More...](#)

Former officer fatally shot by police while trying to flee persecution in Turkey

Sedat Türkmen, a former police officer who was fired by an emergency decree as part of Turkey's post-coup purge of state institutions, died of gunshot wounds while trying to flee persecution in Turkey. [More...](#)



3. Crackdown on the Kurdish political movement and opposition groups



The Turkish government's persecution of the Kurdish political movement and pressures on other opposition groups persisted throughout 2023, a year in which Turkey held presidential and legislative elections.

The May 2023 re-election of President Erdoğan and the victory of the ruling AKP in parliamentary elections consolidated his authoritarian rule in Turkey and increased pressure on perceived critics and political opponents.

The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which was under the threat of closure by the high court, went through several name changes, including the Green Left Party (YSP), and ultimately settled on the Peoples' Democracy and Equality Party, which was abbreviated as DEM after the Supreme Court of Appeals refused to authorize its initial acronym, HEDEP.

The DEM party continued to be in the crosshairs of President Erdoğan, ruling AKP officials and the pro-government mainstream media, which accuse it of affiliation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed separatist group designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey and much of the international community.

Former HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, who were imprisoned in late 2016, spent the year behind bars despite an outstanding ECtHR order for Demirtaş's release, while scores of former HDP politicians, including MPs and elected mayors who were ousted by the Ministry of Interior, continued to sit in pretrial detention, stand trial and serve their sentences.

Other segments of the opposition also went into elections under pressure from the authorities, most notably Ekrem İmamoğlu, the popular mayor of İstanbul whose potential nomination for the presidential election was obstructed by a

politically motivated insult trial that continued to hang over his head throughout the year.

Here are some of the headlines from 2023 that concern the crackdown on Kurdish politicians and other political opposition:



Erdoğan vowed not to release Demirtaş from prison as long as he is in power

President Erdoğan promised not to release jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş from prison as long as he remains in power, a statement seen by many as an admission that Demirtaş's imprisonment is politically motivated. [More..](#)

Demirtaş, who attended the hearing via video link from prison in Edirne, claimed that he is being persecuted because he is Kurdish and a Kurdish politician. [More..](#)

ECtHR faulted Turkey for violating confidentiality of jailed Kurdish leaders' lawyer interviews

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Turkey violated the rights of Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, former co-chairs of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party who have been imprisoned since 2016 on terrorism-related charges, by failing to respect the confidentiality of their interviews with their lawyers. [More..](#)

İstanbul's popular opposition mayor faced trial

İstanbul's popular opposition mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu went on trial in June on fresh corruption charges that further clouded his hopes of succeeding President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. [More..](#)



Main opposition party mayor got suspended sentence on Erdoğan insult charges

Halil Arda, mayor of the Gaziemir district of western İzmir province, was handed down a one-year suspended sentence for insulting President Erdoğan on social media. [More..](#)

Top court found rights violation in terror conviction of association member

Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled that the conviction of a man on terrorism charges over the alleged links of an association he's a member of to a terrorist organization violated his right to organize.

The Malatya branch president of the Society Association (Toplum-Der), who is identified only by the initials C.A. and was arrested on charges of membership in a terrorist organization, was sentenced to more than six years in prison by the Malatya 3rd High Criminal Court and released pending appeal in February 2015. [More..](#)

Top prosecutor portrayed pro-Kurdish party as 'recruitment office' for PKK

Bekir Şahin, the chief public prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, who is seeking to close down the country's second largest opposition party, the pro-Kurdish HDP, has accused the party of acting like the recruitment office of the outlawed PKK. [More..](#)



25 members of anti-government Furkan Foundation faced investigation for revealing police mistreatment

A Turkish prosecutor in the southern province of Adana launched an investigation into 25 members of the

Furkan Foundation, an anti-government religious group, for social media posts claiming police mistreatment during a protest in March 2022. [More..](#)

Turkey investigated presidents of 12 bar associations for insult due to statement on military operations

Turkish prosecutors launched an investigation into the presidents of 12 bar associations across the country on allegations of insulting the Turkish state due to a joint statement they made against the country's military operations in Syria and Iraq. [More..](#)

Turkish prosecutor demanded 15 years for Kurdish villager who was allegedly beaten by security forces

A Turkish prosecutor demanded 15 years in prison for Kurdish villager Osman Şiban, who was allegedly beaten by security forces in Van province and was accused of membership in the outlawed PKK, at the second hearing of his trial held in January. [More..](#)

Turkey's top court removed freeze on funds allocated to pro-Kurdish party

Turkey's Constitutional Court removed a freeze on state funds allocated to the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) before the presidential and parliamentary elections in May. [More..](#)

Author, sociologist Selek said won't return to Turkey to stand trial

Pinar Selek, a Turkish-French dissident sociologist and author living in France, did not go to Turkey to stand trial, the latest twist in a 25-year legal battle with the authorities. Turkey accused Selek over a 1998 explosion that killed seven people and even after four acquittals wanted her in the dock again after issuing an international arrest warrant in January. [More..](#)

21 faced detention in southern Turkey for financially helping inmates from leftist terror groups

A prosecutor's office in southern Turkey issued detention warrants for 21 people on the grounds that they provided financial support to people who are jailed over alleged links to leftist terror groups. [More..](#)

İstanbul police detained 59 at event marking 10th anniversary of Gezi protests

Police intervention in a demonstration held in central İstanbul by a group wanting to mark the 10th anniversary of the anti-government Gezi Park protests and commemorate the activists killed in the 2013 events resulted in the detention of 59 people. [More..](#)

Turkish police in June dispersed a demonstration by a group commemorating 26-year-old activist Ethem Sarısülük, who was killed during the Gezi Park protests. [More..](#)



Grup Yorum concert for 'quake solidarity' cancelled by local authorities

Folk music band Grup Yorum said on Twitter that a concert scheduled to take place on July 7 in İstanbul's Sultangazi district was cancelled by the local authorities. The group

said the concert was intended to increase solidarity for the victims of major earthquakes that hit southeastern Turkish provinces in early February. [More..](#)

İstanbul mayor's bus pelted during election campaign

Angry protesters on May 8 pelted İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's campaign bus with stones while he was touring Turkey's conservative heartland ahead of the general election. [More..](#)

Former Kurdish MP detained over 2014 protests in reaction to ISIL siege of Syrian Kurdish town

Hüda Kaya, a former member of the Turkish parliament from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was detained at İstanbul Airport in November on charges of "participating in an unlawful assembly," part of an ongoing investigation related to the "Kobanê trial." [More..](#)



Kurdish politician in Turkey kept in jail despite eligibility for release

Gültan Kışanak, a Kurdish politician and the former co-mayor of Diyarbakır incarcerated in Turkey, was denied release by the authorities despite her eligibility to be freed. [More..](#)

Trustees appointed to municipalities upon Erdoğan's instructions, then-interior minister said

Then-interior minister Süleyman Soylu said trustees in municipalities in Kurdish-majority southeastern Turkey were appointed by his ministry upon instructions from President Erdoğan. [More..](#)

Top prosecutor in Turkey defied Constitutional Court ruling, said jailed MP should not be released

The office of Turkey's top prosecutor found the continued incarceration of an opposition lawmaker legally appropriate despite a recent ruling from the country's Constitutional Court stating that the lawmaker's rights were violated. [More..](#)

Turkey detained 126 in operation targeting Kurds ahead of critical elections

Turkey in April detained 126 pro-Kurdish activists, journalists and lawyers in raids conducted just three weeks before the general election on May 9. [More..](#)

4. Crackdown on rights defenders

The situation of human rights defenders in Turkey has significantly deteriorated since a coup attempt in July 2016, with the HRDs subjected to judicial harassment over the last seven years.

Since 2016 international organizations and rights groups have repeatedly asked Turkey to guarantee that the rights and freedoms of human rights defenders are fully respected.

In 2023 human rights defenders continued to face baseless investigations, prosecutions and convictions. They were accused of “membership in an armed terrorist organization,” “disseminating terrorist propaganda” and “insulting President Erdoğan.” Turkish police have raided the offices of human rights organizations and detained rights advocates.

Prominent businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala remained behind bars during the year despite a 2019 ECtHR ruling that found his detention was in pursuance of an “ulterior motive,” that of silencing him as a human rights defender. The non-implementation of the ECtHR ruling prompted the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to launch an infringement procedure against Turkey in February.

In October the PACE adopted a resolution and urged Turkey to comply with the judgments of the ECtHR and called for the immediate release of Kavala.

In January a Turkish court convicted Şebnem Korur Fincancı, president of the Turkish Medical Association and a renowned human rights activist, of disseminating “terrorist propaganda” in a trial seen by government critics as an attempt to silence dissent.

In September the Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the convictions in the Gezi Park trial of five defendants including Kavala as well as human rights lawyer and Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) lawmaker Can Atalay, journalist and film producer Çiğdem Mater, city planner Tayfun Kahraman and filmmaker Mine Özerden.

The government’s oppression of human rights defenders extended to activists who fled to Turkey from other countries. An Egyptian activist was detained in İstanbul and sent to a repatriation center in eastern Turkey, while authorities decided on the deportation of an Iranian refugee who was detained at a Pride march in İstanbul despite the fact that he could face a death sentence in Iran due to his sexual orientation.

Here is some of the most important news from 2023 in the crackdown on human rights defenders:

Turkey's top doctor and human rights activist Fincancı was convicted in chemical weapons trial

A Turkish court convicted Şebnem Korur Fincancı, president of the Turkish Medical Association and a renowned human rights activist, of disseminating “terrorist propaganda” in a trial seen by government critics as an attempt to silence dissent. The court sentenced Fincancı, also an expert in forensic medicine, to two years, eight months and 15 days in prison and ordered her immediate release from pretrial detention pending appeal. [More...](#)

Retrial of rights activists began in Istanbul after high court overturned their convictions

A Turkish court began to hear the retrial of four rights activists after Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals overturned their July 2020 convictions on terrorism-related charges. Eleven human rights defenders, including refugee rights lawyer and honorary chair of Amnesty International's Turkey section Taner Kılıç, were accused of terrorism for attending a meeting on İstanbul's Büyükada Island in 2017. They were targeted by President Erdoğan, who alleged that the meeting's agenda was to plan the continuation of a coup attempt against his government on July 15, 2016. [More...](#)

Int'l rights groups called for release of detained Kurdish journalists, political activists in Turkey

International media freedom and human rights organizations called on Turkish authorities to stop their “systematic harassment and intimidation of Kurdish journalists, media workers, and political party officials,” urging the release of people detained in coordinated raids. [More...](#)



Police broke up protest, detained 30 commemorating slain Gezi activist

Turkish police dispersed a demonstration by a group commemorating an activist who was killed during the nationwide anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013, detaining 30 protesters. The

group gathered near a park in central Ankara where 26-year-old Ethem Sarısülük was injured by a gunshot to the head on June 1, 2013. He died in a hospital 14 days later. [More...](#)

Turkey moved to deport LGBTI+ activist facing possible execution in Iran

Turkish authorities decided on the deportation of an Iranian refugee who was detained at a Pride march in İstanbul despite the fact that he could face a death sentence in Iran due to his sexual orientation. [More...](#)

Turkey's top appeals court upheld convictions of Kavala, 4 others in Gezi Park trial

The Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the convictions of five defendants including prominent businessman and civil society leader Osman Kavala in the Gezi Park trial, while it overturned the convictions of three others. The four other defendants whose convictions were upheld were human rights lawyer and Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) lawmaker Can Atalay, journalist and film producer Çiğdem Mater, city planner Tayfun Kahraman and filmmaker Mine Özerden. [More...](#)

Activists were kept in prison due to 'lack of good conduct'

A prison administration in İstanbul rejected a petition from well-known activist, writer and journalist Celalettin Can concerning his right to be released on probation, arguing a "lack of good conduct" and "the continuing risk of causing harm to society." [More...](#)

Kurdish political activist in Turkey faced deportation to Iran

Kurdish political activist Amir Kahrizi faced deportation to Iran despite being entitled to protection as a refugee, according to international obligations. Kahrizi was arrested in Greece on May 7 for entering Europe as a refugee and handed over to authorities in Turkey, where he is at risk of being deported to Iran. [More...](#)



PACE urged Turkey to uphold Strasbourg court rulings, release Osman Kavala

The PACE adopted a resolution urging Turkey to comply with the judgments of the ECtHR and calling for the immediate release of philanthropist and businessman Osman Kavala. [More...](#)

Turkey condemned ‘unacceptable’ European award to Osman Kavala

Turkey slammed PACE for awarding its top rights prize to jailed Turkish philanthropist Osman Kavala, who has come under repeated attack from President Erdoğan. [More...](#)

Court in Western Turkey sentenced 4 activists over Boğaziçi protests

A court in İzmir handed down varying prison sentences to four people due to their attendance at a gathering in support of Boğaziçi University protests. The court convicted the four defendants on charges of attending an unsanctioned gathering and resisting the police, while acquitting two others who stood trial on the same charges. [More...](#)

Anti-Sisi activist facing deportation from Turkey went on a hunger strike

An Egyptian activist who was detained in İstanbul and sent to a repatriation center in eastern Turkey went on a hunger strike for six days in protest of her detention. Ghada Naguib, 51 years old and a mother of four, was detained at her home in İstanbul's Başakşehir district on October 1. [More...](#)

72-year-old Gezi Park trial defendant recounted harsh conditions in İstanbul prison

Mücella Yapıcı, a prominent architect and a defendant in the Gezi Park trial who was released from an İstanbul prison in September, recounted the poor prison conditions she faced as an older woman. [More...](#)



Women's rights activist was acquitted of charges of insulting former minister

A member of a women's rights group who stood trial on charges of insulting a former interior minister was acquitted. Didar Gül, a member of the Mor Dayanışma women's rights group, was tried due to remarks she made in a press statement regarding the prison sentence handed down to a man who was convicted of killing an employee of a pro-Kurdish party in İzmir. [More...](#)

Syrian human rights activist went missing in İstanbul

A Syrian human rights activist who has been living in Turkey since 2013 went missing on November 27. Ahmed Katie, 45, also a non-practicing lawyer, went missing after leaving his workplace in İstanbul's Yusufpaşa neighborhood after he was reportedly summoned by the police. [More...](#)

Family of missing Syrian human rights activist said they felt unsafe in Turkey

The wife of Ahmed Katie, a Syrian human rights activist who went missing in Istanbul in late November, announced that she and her children were living in fear since Katie's disappearance. Speaking at a press conference organized by human rights group Mazlumder, Katie's wife said he had been receiving threats due to his activism, sometimes from migration authorities. [More...](#)



5. Earthquake victims

On February 6, magnitude 7.8 and 7.5 earthquakes affected 11 provinces in Turkey's south and southeast, killing more than 50,000 people and leaving millions homeless. The devastating earthquakes injured over 100,000, and close to 220,000 disaster victims were evacuated from the region.

Nearly a year after the disaster, residents of Turkey's southeastern provinces are still struggling to access necessities such as electricity, clean water, public transportation and proper housing. Most victims were put in tent cities, which were suitable for neither hot summers nor cold winters. The tents were flooded several times over the year after heavy rains.

Residents and representatives of grassroots organizations said Turkish authorities were negligent and slow to respond to the needs of victims.

The lack of proper infrastructure has given way to contagious diseases and vermin infestations. Some groups, such as women, migrants, the disabled and students, were more negatively impacted by these problems than others.

Furthermore, the earthquakes generated between 116 million and 210 million tons of rubble, and the government has been criticized for allowing inexperienced workers to move it. Although unions repeatedly voiced occupational safety and health concerns, the government still has not responded with a plan to remedy these problems.

Here is some of the most important news from 2023 dealing with the earthquake disaster:

Disabled earthquake victims complained of limited access to aid



Disabled people living in tent cities after their homes were destroyed by earthquakes in southeastern Turkey on February 6 said it was difficult for them to access aid. Several tent cities were set up in the region; however, they were located far from aid distribution centers and in most cases were also at a distance from public toilets. [More...](#)

Tent city in earthquake disaster zone at risk of flooding, Turkish Chamber of Civil Engineers warned

Amid devastating earthquakes that hit southeastern Turkey on February 6, the Turkish Chamber of Civil Engineers warned that a tent city in Diyarbakır

province was at risk of being flooded by overflow from a dam. A tent city was set up on the banks of the Tigris River for people whose homes were turned to rubble in the earthquakes. Mahsun Çiya Korkmaz, co-chair of the Diyarbakır Chamber of Civil Engineers, said the dam on the Tigris River had malfunctioned in 2018, causing water levels to rise more than three meters. The area housing the tent city was completely flooded at the time. [More...](#)

Gov't under fire for not providing shelter to earthquake survivors despite massive aid

The Turkish government, which had been receiving growing criticism due to what many say was its poor response to powerful earthquakes that hit the country's south in February, came under fire again for not providing shelter to survivors despite a huge amount of aid received from within Turkey and from overseas for earthquake victims. [More...](#)

Turkish doctors filed complaint against gov't officials for 70 deaths in hospital destroyed by earthquakes

The Turkish Physicians Union (Hekimler Birliği) filed a complaint against the government officials they claim were responsible for the collapse of a hospital building in the southern province of Hatay in major earthquakes on February 6 and the resulting death of 70 doctors and patients. [More...](#)

Mistreatment, rights violations increased in prisons in southern Turkey following devastating earthquakes

Prisoners in the provinces of southern Turkey hit by devastating earthquakes on February 6 faced increased mistreatment and rights abuses, according to lawyers from the Human Rights Association (İHD). [More...](#)

Turkey's broadcasting watchdog imposed fines on 3 TV stations due to earthquake coverage

Turkey's broadcasting watchdog, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), imposed fines and broadcasting bans on three TV stations for their coverage in the aftermath of two powerful earthquakes early last year. The council fined Tele 1, Halk TV and Fox TV in addition to implementing a five-day broadcasting ban on Tele 1 and Halk TV. [More...](#)

Turkish Red Crescent under fire for selling tents after earthquake

The Turkish opposition and media criticized the Red Crescent (Kızılay) humanitarian group for selling rather than donating tents for those made homeless by the deadly earthquakes in February. According to the Cumhuriyet daily, the Turkish Red Crescent sold 2,050 tents to the Foundation of Anatolian People and Peace Platform (AHBAP) relief organization for 46 million Turkish lira (\$2.4 million). [More...](#)

Former teacher arrested to serve sentence for Gülen links after rescue from earthquake rubble

A former civil servant who went into hiding after receiving a sentence of more than six years in prison for links to the Gülen movement was arrested after being rescued from the rubble of a building in southeastern Turkey. [More...](#)



Turkey excluded post-coup purge victims from scholarships offered to students affected by devastating earthquakes

The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) announced a scholarship program for students who were affected by deadly earthquakes that struck southern Turkey on February 6, stating that individuals who were dismissed from civil service jobs following a July 15, 2016 coup attempt were not eligible to apply. [More...](#)

Experts warned against contagious disease outbreaks in earthquake disaster zone

Experts from the Healthcare and Social Workers Union (SES) warned against increasing cases of contagious disease spreading in tent cities that were set up after massive earthquakes hit southeastern Turkey in early February. [More...](#)

CPJ called on Turkey to drop criminal charges against journalists over earthquake coverage

The CPJ [called](#) on Turkey to ensure that members of the press do not face criminal charges over coverage of earthquakes in the country in February and to immediately release two journalists detained for their work. The call came amid the arrest of two local journalists due to social media posts questioning the authorities over tents allegedly withheld from quake victims in Osmaniye province. [More...](#)

17 people mistreated, 4 journalists detained, 3 prisoners died in region hit by earthquakes: report

At least 17 people were mistreated by security officers in provinces of southern Turkey that were hit by devastating earthquakes in early February, and three inmates died in post-quake prison riots, according to a report released by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV). [More...](#)

Women contended with added burdens from Turkey's earthquake disaster

From underwear to personal hygiene products, women lacked basic necessities in earthquake zones, according to doctors working in the field. More women were having genital issues because of poor hygiene in the tent cities, but they were still in shock and too traumatized to start thinking about their own bodies — even when they were pregnant. [More...](#)

Journalist detained at Ankara airport over earthquake coverage

Journalist Firat Bulut from the Yeşil Gazete news website was detained at the airport in Ankara over his coverage of the earthquakes in Turkey. He was detained as part of an investigation into him for “publicly disseminating misleading information to the public,” Bulut tweeted from the airport, saying he had been reporting from the region hit by earthquakes in early February. [More...](#)

Earthquake restrictions muzzled Turkish media ahead of elections

A state of emergency imposed in Turkey's earthquake-hit southeast was shackling reporters, a top media rights campaigner told AFP, expressing fears they would be pressured in the run-up to the May elections. [More...](#)



Environmentalists warned the mishandling of earthquake debris posed threat to environment and public health

The Chamber of Environmental Engineers warned that the incredible amount of debris from thousands of buildings that were destroyed in earthquakes that struck southeastern Turkey in February posed serious dangers to public health and the environment. Environmental engineers said in an optimistic estimation that the earthquakes, which affected 11 provinces, had resulted in 104 million tons of debris that also includes chemical, medical and industrial waste as well as asbestos and sewage. [More...](#)



Earthquakes hit one-fifth of Turkey's food production: UN

The devastating earthquakes that hit southern Turkey in February damaged more than 20 percent of Turkey's agricultural production. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said initial assessments in Turkey revealed "severe damage to agriculture, including crops, livestock, fisheries

and aquaculture, as well as rural infrastructure in affected areas." [More...](#)

Turkish police, gendarmerie committed abuses in earthquake zone: rights groups

Turkish law enforcement officers in the region devastated by earthquakes in early February beat, tortured and otherwise ill-treated people they suspected of theft and looting, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. [More...](#)

Erdogan's son-in-law filed lawsuit over tweet questioning drones' capabilities after earthquakes

Selçuk Bayraktar, the chief technical officer of Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) producer Baykar who is also the son-in-law of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, filed a lawsuit over a tweet criticizing the drones' inability to function following two powerful earthquakes in February. [More...](#)

Authorities neglected the disabled in Turkey's earthquake zone, said Amnesty report

A [report](#) released by Amnesty International revealed that people with disabilities in Turkey's earthquake zone were being neglected by the authorities and humanitarian actors. The report, titled "We all need dignity: The exclusion of persons with disabilities in Türkiye's earthquake response," revealed that people with disabilities who were living in displacement camps since massive earthquakes struck in early February were being overlooked in the humanitarian response to the disaster. [More...](#)

Scabies outbreak in earthquake region sparked concern of Turkish doctors

Doctors expressed concern over a scabies outbreak in tent cities located in an area of Turkey struck by two powerful earthquakes in February. Scabies is a contagious, intensely itchy skin condition caused by a tiny, burrowing mite. [More...](#)

Thousands of children lost parents in Turkey's earthquake disaster

A total of 3,500 children lost either one or both parents in earthquakes that devastated several southeastern Turkish provinces in early February. Thousands of children in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman provinces were orphaned in the earthquakes, and 2,500 were staying with relatives in the region. Almost 1,000 children moved out of the affected provinces to live with relatives in other parts of the country. [More...](#)

Authorities took steps to evict victims of devastating February earthquakes from temporary housing

The Ankara Governor's Office issued an order to evict victims of February 6 earthquakes from temporary housing. While thousands were left homeless, those who were able to find temporary housing were once again facing homelessness as authorities had not presented them with other housing options. [More...](#)

Earthquake victims in southeastern Turkey living in despair and hopelessness

Months after two devastating earthquakes destroyed thousands of homes in southeastern Hatay province, victims said they were living in despair and hopelessness. Victims said access to basic necessities such as clean water was still very limited. They also feared the approaching winter months since most were living in tents and containers. In addition to these problems, victims were grappling with problems of safety, with a growing number of women reporting sexual or physical harassment. [More...](#)

Turkish court released police chief arrested for alleged theft of February 6 earthquake aid

A Turkish court released a police chief who was arrested for allegedly stealing assistance intended for survivors of earthquakes that devastated southeastern Turkey in February. [More...](#)



Tap water in Hatay was still unsafe to drink 8 months after Turkey's devastating earthquakes

An analysis conducted by healthcare and professional organizations showed that tap water in Hatay, one of the areas hardest hit by two powerful earthquakes in February, was still unsafe to drink. [More...](#)

University students in Turkey's earthquake disaster zone grappled with disease, floods and infestations

University students living in tent cities in Turkey's earthquake disaster zone contended with flooding, contagious disease outbreaks and vermin infestations. Since most student dormitories sustained heavy damage in the earthquakes, students were staying in tents provided by NATO. The tents were organized so that 10 students shared one tent and used common toilets. The winter months and increasingly rainy weather caused flooding in the tents and common bathroom areas. Insects as well as snakes and scorpions infested the tents to escape from the cold. [More...](#)

Union leaders drew attention to increased occupational accidents in Turkey's earthquake zones

A union leader said inexperienced workers employed to move rubble in Turkey's earthquake zones were falling victim to work-related accidents. Ahmet Sert, chairman of the TIMOSEN construction workers union, criticized authorities for the lack of inspection and supervision in earthquake zones, the scene of intensive work to clear debris from the February 2023 earthquakes. [More...](#)

6. Labour Rights

Turkey is one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people, according to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The Health and Safety Labor Watch (İSiG) recorded nearly 2,000 fatal work-related accidents in 2023 and 31,131 fatal accidents since the AKP came to power in November 2002.

According to occupational safety experts and union leaders, people have been suffering from lax work safety standards for decades in Turkey, where workplace accidents are nearly a daily occurrence.

Furthermore, they have criticized the government for turning the country into a source of cheap labor for Europe at the expense of proper safety measures. Workers often feel obliged to work under unsafe conditions fearing that they will become jobless and unable to support their families.

Union leaders on several occasions said poor working conditions in Turkey were directly related to the government's oppressive policies and that a stronger democracy was vital for improving workers' rights. Government policies have made it impossible for workers to join unions or demonstrate for better working conditions and safety precautions.

According to an ITUC report, the Turkish government imposed severe restrictions on civil liberties, and workers' rights were violated with police crackdowns on protests and the arbitrary arrest of union leaders.

Turkey was categorized as a country where there was "no guarantee of labor rights," meaning that while a country's legislation may spell out certain rights, workers effectively have no access to these rights and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair labor practices.

Here is some of the most important news from 2023 in the area of labor rights:

Nearly 2,000 workers died in occupational accidents in 2023: ISIG



Turkey recorded at least 1,772 deaths in work-related accidents in the first 11 months of 2023. People have been suffering from lax work safety standards for decades in Turkey, where workplace accidents are nearly a daily occurrence. In the worst work-related accident in the country's history, 301 miners lost their lives in an explosion in Manisa's Soma district in May 2014. [More...](#)

German companies planned to end trade with Turkish suppliers violating human rights

With the entry into force of a new law in Germany holding companies accountable for human rights and environmental violations in their supply chains, Turkish companies risked falling under the same legislation and excluded from doing business with Germany in the event of human rights violations in the production of their exports. [More...](#)

Medical groups, rights organizations called on Turkey to end persecution of doctors

In a joint letter addressed to President Erdoğan, leading international medical and human rights organizations called on Turkey to drop charges against the leadership of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB). [More...](#)

Nuclear power plant in southern Turkey fired 30 workers for volunteering in earthquake region, union claimed

The Construction Workers Union (İnşaat-İş) claimed a nuclear power plant in the southern Turkish province of Mersin fired 30 construction workers who had volunteered to join search and rescue efforts after Turkey was struck by devastating earthquakes on February 6. [More...](#)

Turkey was among 10 worst countries for working people: ITUC

A yearly report by the ITUC on labor rights revealed that Turkey was one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people. According to the Brussels-based ITUC, workers' freedoms and rights continued to be relentlessly denied with police crackdowns on protests in Turkey in 2022. [More...](#)

Seasonal workers attacked by locals in southwest Turkey for speaking Kurdish

Three Kurdish seasonal workers were allegedly attacked for speaking Kurdish by a group of locals in Bodrum, a popular tourist destination in southwestern Turkey. [More...](#)



Turkey ranked 5th in world index measuring prevalence of modern slavery

There were more than 1.3 million people living in modern slavery in Turkey, which ranked fifth among 151 countries in which modern slavery has been the most prevalent. The study, which concerns data from 2021, was

produced by the Australian-based human rights organization Walk Free. [More...](#)

Record number of doctors sought to leave Turkey after May 14 election

Statistics from the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) showed that a record number of 144 physicians applied for a certificate of good standing in advance of moving abroad after the May general election. Doctors in Turkey increasingly continued to leave the country as the AKP government failed to meet their demands for manageable workloads and increased security and pay. [More...](#)

Turkey needs a stronger democracy to improve workers' rights, said union representatives

Union representatives in Turkey spoke to the media on the occasion of May 1, Labor Day, and said the country needed a stronger democracy to improve workers' rights. In an interview with Deutsche Welle Turkish service, union officials said they demand freedom and democracy for all members of society. "Democracy in Turkey is weakened, and we need to work on building a stronger democratic rule," said Adnan Serdaroğlu from the United Metal Workers Union (Birleşik Metal-İş). "This also means that we demand that workers' rights improve and be comparable to rights in other democratic countries." [More...](#)

888 child workers have died in occupational accidents in Turkey during AKP rule: İSiG

A total of 888 child workers have died in work-related accidents since the AKP came to power in November 2002. [More...](#)

Dock worker drowned after falling into water without life vest

A 20-year-old dock worker in Istanbul's Tuzla dockyard died after falling into the sea, once again raising concern over workplace safety in Turkey. Ibrahim Dal's body was discovered two hours later without a life vest, which according to regulations he should have been wearing. In a tweet the Health and Safety Labor Watch (İSiG) said it was outrageous the employer had not ensured workers were wearing their safety equipment. [More...](#)

Seasonal workers killed in traffic accident in southeastern Turkey's Urfa province

Three seasonal workers died and 17 others were injured in a traffic accident in southeastern Urfa province, once again raising concerns over occupational safety, Turkish media outlets reported. A van carrying the seasonal workers crashed into a wall, killing three female laborers. [More...](#)



At least 40 child workers died in Turkey in first eight months of 2023: opposition MP

Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy Fethi Açıkel announced that at least 40 child workers in Turkey lost their lives in the first eight months of the year. [More...](#)

Record number of doctors sought to leave Turkey in September, TTB data showed

Statistics from the TTB showed that a record number of 321 physicians applied for a certificate of good standing in advance of moving abroad in September, with the total reaching 1,649 in the first nine months of 2023. [More...](#)

3 doctors took their own lives in a single day: Turkish Medical Association

The TTB announced that three young doctors died by suicide in different parts of Turkey in single day, calling for immediate measures to address the various problems faced by the country's physicians. [More...](#)

Amnesty Int'l fired 8 employees after withdrawing from collective bargaining talks

The Turkey branch of London-based Amnesty International fired eight of its 24 employees after the failure of collective bargaining talks with a labor union representing the employees. [More...](#)

190 miners in Turkey went on a hunger strike for unpaid wages and benefits

Coal miners working in a mine belonging to Doruk Madencilik in the western Turkish province of Eskişehir went on a hunger strike, demanding unpaid wages and benefits. Seven of the 190 miners were hospitalized. [More...](#)

7. Minority and Refugee Rights

Minority groups in Turkey suffered discrimination, hate speech and assaults, while a climate of impunity emboldened the offenders.

President Erdoğan, his far-right ally Devlet Bahçeli and other government officials adopted an ultranationalist rhetoric that equated Kurdish political dissent and assertive expression of Kurdish identity to terrorism, while some segments of the opposition fueled a growing anti-migrant sentiment among the public, jeopardizing the safety of the country's sizeable refugee community.

A report released by the Center for Sociopolitical Field Studies [concluded](#) that Kurds, Alevis and migrants suffered at least 208 racist and discriminatory attacks throughout the year.

The Minority Rights Group International (MRG) [reported](#) discrimination against Alevis, Nusayris, Rom, Dom and Abdals living in Turkey's southern provinces that were hit by earthquakes on February 6.

The May presidential and parliamentary elections brought up migration as an issue, with far-right opposition factions [promising](#) massive deportation of Syrian refugees to their war-torn country, while presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu [announced](#) a two-year plan to ensure the return home of Syrian refugees. Such rhetoric openly disregarded the international legal principle of non-refoulement.

In June the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV) [reported](#) that an increase in hate crimes led to the death of 21 refugees between January 2020 and November 2022.

The same month, the SCF [released](#) a report titled "Hate Speech and Hate Crimes against Syrian Refugees in Turkey," a study that details verbal and physical assaults on refugees who fled the civil war in the neighboring country.

Turkey's religious minorities continued their legal struggle for property rights, while the LGBT community became the target of the ruling party and its allies, who used them as a talking point in an effort to consolidate their voter base during the general election in May.

The authorities imposed restrictions on Pride Week events in June, citing "protection of the family."

Here are some of the important headlines concerning minority and refugee rights from 2023:

72-year-old Kurdish inmate died shortly after belated release from prison

Hamdin Ördek, 72, a Kurdish inmate who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, died six days after he was belatedly released from prison. [More..](#)

Turkish court acquitted police officer who killed Kurdish student

A court acquitted police officer Yakup Şenocak, who shot Kurdish university student Kemal Kurkut to death during Nevruz celebrations in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır in 2017. [More..](#)



Kemal Kurkut (Photo by Abdurrahman Gök)

Hundreds detained in Nevruz celebrations

The Nevruz celebrations of 2023, which lacked the enthusiasm of previous years due to massive earthquakes that claimed the lives of tens of thousands in February, were also marred by the detention of hundreds of participants. [More..](#)

Close to 200 people celebrating Nevruz were detained in a single day in March. [More..](#)

3 Turkish policemen arrested for allegedly beating 14-year-old Kurdish boy during Nevruz celebrations

Three Turkish police officers were arrested for allegedly beating a 14-year-old Kurdish boy during Nevruz celebrations in the predominantly Kurdish province of Diyarbakır. [More..](#)

Seasonal workers attacked by locals in southwest Turkey for speaking Kurdish

Three seasonal workers were allegedly attacked for speaking in Kurdish by a group of locals in Bodrum, a popular tourist destination in southwestern Turkey. [More..](#)



Kurdish street musician stabbed to death in İstanbul for refusing to sing nationalist song

Cihan Aymaz, a Kurdish street musician, was stabbed to death in İstanbul after he refused to sing a nationalist song. [More..](#)

Turkey detained 12 musicians who performed during pro-Kurdish party's election campaign

Twelve musicians who performed during the election campaign of the pro-Kurdish Green Left Party (YSP) were detained in the western province of İzmir. [More..](#)

İstanbul police detained 4 young Kurds doing traditional dance

Four young Kurdish men who were doing a traditional dance to music played from loudspeakers were detained by İstanbul police and forced to lie on the ground in handcuffs. [More..](#)

Armored vehicle killed 5-year-old boy in southeastern Hakkari province

A 5-year-old boy died after being hit by an armored vehicle in southeastern Turkey's Hakkari province. [More..](#)

İstanbul governor banned march aimed at calling attention to suppression of Kurdish language

The İstanbul Governor's Office banned a march aimed at drawing attention to the suppression of the Kurdish language and Kurds' longstanding demand for access to education in their mother tongue. [More..](#)

Turkish police detained dozens during Saturday Mothers' weekly vigils

In August the police detained 47 people, including activists and family members of the Saturday Mothers, during the group's 957th weekly demonstration in İstanbul's Galatasaray Square, where they were demanding justice for their loved ones who disappeared in police custody in the 1990s. [More..](#)

The following month, another police intervention in the group's gathering ended in 32 detentions. [More..](#)

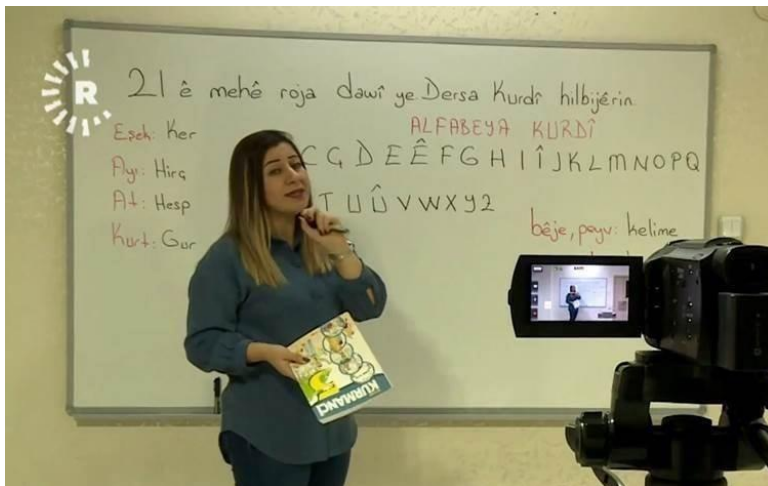


Kurdish musician undergoing treatment for cancer arrested on terror-related charges

Emel Çiftçi, a Kurdish musician who was undergoing treatment for cancer, was arrested on terrorism-related charges in southeastern Turkey despite medical reports confirming her condition. [More..](#)

Turkey arrested 78-year-old disabled Kurdish villager on terrorism charges

Turkish authorities detained and arrested Emin Soyal, a 78-year-old man with documented disabilities and health issues, for alleged links to terrorism. [More..](#)



Kurdish language teacher suffered threats and insults on social media

Mizgin Yalçın, a teacher of the Kurdish language based in Diyarbakır, received numerous insulting and threatening messages on social media after she shared a video in which she mentioned the Kurdish names of provinces. [More..](#)

Turkey's ATK found 81-year-old disabled Kurdish woman fit for imprisonment

The Council of Forensic Medicine (ATK) issued a report that deemed Makbule Özer, an 81-year-old Kurdish woman with serious disabilities and health problems, fit to serve her prison sentence. [More..](#)

US report found that Alevis suffered the most attacks on religious properties in last 20 years

A report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) concluded that Alevis were the religious community that suffered the highest number of attacks on religious properties in Turkey between 2003 and 2022, followed by Protestants and Armenians. [More..](#)

Rejection of request for return of property violated church foundation's rights: Turkey's top court

The Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the Hasköy Aya Paraskevi Church Foundation and said the General Directorate of Foundations' rejection of its request for the return of property constituted a rights violation. [More..](#)

High school students gave Nazi salute to Jewish peers during football game

Students from an İstanbul high school attracted criticism for giving a Hitler salute to students from a Jewish high school during a football match. [More..](#)

Patriarch Bartholomew criticized Turkish authorities for not permitting liturgy at Sümela Monastery

The İstanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians worldwide, expressed frustration with Turkish authorities, saying the patriarchate did not receive written permission to hold the Divine Liturgy at the historic Sümela Monastery in Turkey's northwestern Trabzon province on August 15. [More..](#)

ECtHR found Turkey in violation of Syriac foundation's property rights

The ECtHR faulted Turkey for violating a Syriac foundation's rights by expropriating a property in Mardin province that had been used by the minority community for centuries. [More..](#)

Syriac MP in Turkish parliament faced criticism for conveying Christmas wishes in native language

George Aslan, a Syriac deputy from the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), faced hostile remarks from the far right for using his mother tongue to wish people a happy Christmas during a speech in parliament. [More..](#)



MP from main opposition resigned due to lack of Roma parliamentary candidates from his party

Özcan Purçu, a lawmaker from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), resigned from the party due to the lack of parliamentary candidates from Turkey's Roma community for the general election in May. [More..](#)

Report highlighted worsening poverty among the Roma people

A report drafted by the Roma Memory Studies Association (Romani Godi) revealed how the poverty that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic deepened the rights violations against the Roma community in Turkey and expanded their existing problems in many areas such as employment, education, health, housing and social assistance. [More..](#)

2 soldiers arrested in eastern Turkey for allegedly raping Afghan refugee

Two soldiers in Turkey's eastern Van province were arrested for allegedly raping an Afghan refugee as they were taking a group of refugees to the border to deport them. [More..](#)



Uyghur living in Turkey for 10 years detained, sent to migrant removal center

Abdullah Abdülhamit, a Uyghur refugee, was detained and sent to a removal center in Istanbul. Rights groups expressed concern for his potential deportation to China, where the Turkic group is systematically mistreated. [More..](#)

3 Turkish gendarmes detained over alleged killing of 2 Syrian refugees at border

Three Turkish gendarmes were detained for the death of two Syrian refugees who were allegedly killed at the Turkey-Syria border. [More..](#)

Report revealed widespread discrimination of refugees in Turkey's quake zone

Following massive earthquakes that hit the southern provinces in February, refugees in the quake zone – most of them Syrian – were subjected to “multi-layered discrimination,” including hate speech, ill-treatment and physical violence, according to a report by the Association for Migration Research (GAR). [More..](#)

HRW accused Turkey's border guards of shooting, torturing Syrians

Human Rights Watch accused Turkish border guards of shooting, torturing and using excessive force against Syrians seeking to flee their war-torn country into neighboring Turkey. [More..](#)

Turkey's top appeals court upheld sentence of police officer who shot young Syrian refugee to death

Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the conviction of a police officer who shot young Syrian refugee Ali El Hamdani to death in 2020. [More..](#)

384,000 refugees in Turkey will need resettlement in 2024: UNHCR

A total of 384,070 refugees in Turkey were projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, according to a report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). [More..](#)

Turkey decided to deport Iranian LGBT activist facing possible execution in Iran

Turkish authorities decided on the deportation of Elyas Torabibaeskendari, an Iranian refugee who was detained at a Pride march in İstanbul, despite the fact that he could face a death sentence in Iran due to his sexual orientation. [More..](#)

Interior Ministry announced sanctions on unregistered Syrians who failed to leave İstanbul by September 24

The Ministry of Interior announced that sanctions would be imposed on Syrians who failed to leave İstanbul by September 24 despite being registered in other cities. [More..](#)

Turkey deported 20 Syrian refugees after confiscating belongings

Turkish authorities deported 20 Syrian refugees to the city of Ras Al-Ain in northern Syria on August 22, forcing them to sign with their fingerprints documents stating that they asked to return, after confiscating their money, luggage and cell phones. [More..](#)

Top court found no rights violation in ban on 2016 gay pride march in Ankara

The Constitutional Court ruled that the government did not violate the right to peaceful assembly by banning a gay pride march in Ankara planned for May 2016. [More..](#)

President Erdoğan slammed LGBT community, accused opposition of undermining the family

President Erdoğan accused presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and opposition parties of being pro-LGBT and undermining the family in a speech he gave during his election campaign. [More..](#)

After the election, Erdoğan said his government was working on drafting an anti-LGBT constitutional amendment to enshrine the family that will be submitted to parliament. [More..](#)

He continued his verbal attacks on the LGBT community in a parliamentary speech he later delivered. [More..](#)

İstanbul governor announced ban on Pride Week activities over concerns of ‘protecting the family’

İstanbul Governor Davut Gül announced that Pride Week activities in the city would not be allowed, citing concerns about “protection of the family.” [More..](#)

Police prevented Trans Pride March, detained scores of participants

Turkish police prevented LGBT people from holding a demonstration in İstanbul’s Taksim Square and briefly detained 10 of the intending participants based on a ban from the city’s governor’s office. [More..](#)

Later in June the police intervened in other Pride events in İstanbul and İzmir, taking more than 160 people into custody. [More..](#)

Teachers suspended after ex-mayor targeted rainbow decoration for ‘promoting homosexuality’

The Ministry of Education temporarily suspended a teacher and a school principal for using a rainbow decoration at a school event after public criticism from Melih Gökçek, the former mayor of Ankara, who accused the teacher of promoting homosexuality. [More..](#)

Research showed that 90 pct of LGBT individuals in Turkey subjected to digital violence

LGBT advocacy group KAOS GL released a report which revealed that nine out of 10 LGBT individuals in Turkey regularly face digital violence. [More..](#)

Organizers of art exhibition in İstanbul investigated for LGBT propaganda

Turkish prosecutors launched an investigation into the organizers of an art exhibition in İstanbul after the exhibition was targeted by religious and nationalist groups for allegedly promoting homosexuality. [More..](#)

8. Press freedom



The Turkish government continued to enjoy almost full control over the traditional media in 2023, with most mainstream outlets run by people and businesses close to the ruling party and alternative outlets operating under threat of legal harassment, censorship and arbitrary sanctions.

Not surprisingly, Turkey [fell](#) dramatically in the RSF 2023 World Press Freedom Index, slipping 16 places and ranking 165th among 180 countries, not far from North Korea, which occupies the bottom of the list.

Journalism remained a risky profession as journalists faced abusive investigations, detentions, trials and convictions over their reporting or commentary. Charges leveled against media workers included insulting the president or high-ranking officials, denigrating the state or national values, spreading terrorist propaganda, fomenting enmity among the public and, under a controversial law enacted in 2022, 'disseminating misinformation.'

According to a [report](#) by the Dicle Fırat Journalists Association (DFG), a total of 280 journalists appeared in at least 821 court hearings throughout the year, while an opposition politician [reported](#) that the courts arrested 27 out of 72 journalists who were detained by law enforcement.

Turkey was also among the top jailers of journalists in the 2023 prison [census](#) of the CPJ, and a global leader in terms of legal harassment of female journalists in a report [released](#) by the Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ).

The devastating earthquakes of February 6 [claimed](#) the lives of at least 17 journalists.

Media outlets critical of the government were frequently sanctioned over political comments made on the air or news coverage that deviated from the official narrative.

In December a cabinet member [revealed](#) during parliamentary discussions that the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), the country's broadcasting regulator, had imposed a total of 570 sanctions on TV stations since the beginning of the year.

The outlook was also bleak in terms of online freedoms as scores of social media users faced detention and prosecution due to their posts, particularly in the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes, which led to widespread outrage about what some segments of the public perceived as the government's belated, inadequate and chaotic response to the disaster.

According to the 2023 Freedom on the Net [report](#) published by Freedom House, Turkey continued to rank among the “not free” countries concerning online freedoms. In June Jack Dorsey, co-founder of the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, [revealed](#) in a YouTube interview that Turkey had constantly threatened to shut down the platform unless it complied with orders to restrict accounts.

Here is some of the noteworthy press and online freedom news from 2023:

Journalism on trial

ECtHR delivered several judgments against Turkey over the detention of journalists

The ECtHR ruled in February that Turkey violated Articles 5 (1), (3), (4), (5) and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights in the case of Abdullah Kılıç, a journalist who was arrested by a Turkish court following an attempted coup in 2016. [More..](#)

In June the Strasbourg court faulted Turkey in the case of Hidayet Karaca, a prominent journalist and the former chief executive of the Samanyolu Media Group who had been jailed since 2014. [More..](#)

The ECtHR ordered Turkey to pay 9,800 euros to journalist Mehmet Baransu, a former correspondent for the now-defunct Taraf newspaper, for violation of his right to trial within a reasonable period of time. [More..](#)

UN working group said detention of Turkish columnist arbitrary

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) concluded that the arrest and detention of Ali Ünal, a theologian and former columnist for the now-closed Zaman daily, were arbitrary. [More..](#)



Journalist Ali Ünal

Turkish police detained journalist on Working Journalists Day

On Jan. 10, when the work and independence of journalists are celebrated in Turkey, the police detained Sezgin Kartal, a journalist from an anti-government news website. [More...](#)

2 journalists arrested for social media posts on tents allegedly withheld from quake victims

Two journalists were arrested pending trial in Osmaniye, one of 10 provinces hit by the major earthquakes in February, due to social media posts questioning the authorities over tents allegedly withheld from quake victims in the province. [More..](#)

Journalist detained at Ankara airport over earthquake coverage

Journalist Firat Bulut, from the Yeşil Gazete news website, was detained at the airport in Ankara over his coverage of the earthquakes. [More..](#)

AFP photojournalist indicted for insulting police officers who brutally detained him

Agence France-Presse (AFP) photojournalist Bülent Kılıç, who was brutally detained while covering the İstanbul Pride March in 2021, was indicted on charges of insulting a public official and resisting arrest, while prosecutors found no grounds to investigate the police officers who detained him. [More..](#)

Jailed Kurdish journalists indicted on terrorism charges 10 months after detention

Twenty-one people, the vast majority of whom were Kurdish journalists detained in southeastern Diyarbakır province in June 2022, were indicted on terrorism charges 10 months after their detention. [More..](#)

The court accepted the indictment a few days later, and the journalists' first hearing was scheduled for July 11. [More..](#)

Journalist detained in western Turkey after scandalous allegations about failed coup

Turkish police detained Serdar Akinan, a journalist in the western province of Çanakkale, after he made allegations about a failed coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016. [More..](#)

Journalist given suspended sentence on Erdoğan insult charges

A court handed down a suspended sentence to Mustafa Bildircin, a reporter from the anti-government Birgün daily, on charges of insulting President Erdoğan. [More..](#)

Journalist detained while covering dispute during celebrations of Erdoğan election victory

Vedat Aker, a local journalist in the eastern province of Batman, was detained while covering a dispute that erupted during celebrations of President Erdoğan's victory in a runoff election. [More..](#)

Journalist detained over terrorist propaganda accusations

Firat Can Arslan, a correspondent for the Mezopotamya News Agency (MA), was detained in Ankara as part of an investigation by the Kırşehir Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. [More..](#)

Courts handed down suspended sentences to 2 journalists for insult, injury

Two Turkish courts handed down suspended sentences to journalists Gökay Başcan and İdris Yılmaz on charges of insult and intentional injury, respectively. Başcan was sentenced over a photograph and caption used in a 2015 article that criticized the lack of judicial independence in the country, while Yılmaz was convicted for "using his camera as a weapon" when defending himself during a physical assault. [More..](#)

Turkey arrests journalist for remarks on jailed PKK leader

A Turkish court ruled to arrest journalist Merdan Yanardağ on charges of disseminating terrorism propaganda due to his televised remarks about Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). [More..](#)



Journalist Merdan Yanardağ

Journalist indicted for ‘targeting public officials’

An İstanbul court accepted an indictment seeking a prison sentence of up to three years for journalist Ayça Söylemez on charges of “targeting a public official involved in the fight against terrorism.” [More..](#)

Journalist faced multiple insult charges due to social media posts

Furkan Karabay, an editor at the Gerçek Gündem news website, was indicted on charges of insulting public officials in tweets that allegedly targeted two deputy ministers and a member of the country’s top court. [More..](#)

Karabay was also detained and arrested in December for reporting on judicial corruption and was one of the 31 journalists who greeted the new year behind bars. [More..](#)

Journalist given suspended sentence due to social media posts

A Turkish court handed down a suspended 15-month sentence to Kurdish journalist Rojin Altay on charges of disseminating terrorist propaganda in her social media posts. [More..](#)

Journalist indicted on charges of insulting Diyanet executives

Prosecutors indicted journalist Fatih Altaylı on charges of insulting a public official due to his remarks targeting the executives of Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate, also known as the Diyanet. [More..](#)

Journalist sentenced to prison due to report on misused charity donations

A Turkish court handed down a six-month sentence to journalist Sinan Aygül on conviction of trespassing due to a 2020 report about the use of meat

donated to a charity at a hotel co-owned by a former ruling party lawmaker. [More..](#)

Journalist gets suspended sentence for defamation of top judiciary members

A court handed down a suspended sentence of 20 months to journalist Miyase İlknur on conviction of defaming members of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Appeals. [More..](#)

Veteran correspondent from state-run TRT detained

Elif Akkuş, a correspondent from public broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) who was suspended from her job in April, was detained in October. [More..](#)



Journalist Elif Akkuş

Kurdish journalist arrested for alleged links to terrorism

A court in southeastern Turkey ruled to arrest Selahattin Kaygusuz, a Kurdish journalist who was detained for alleged membership in a terrorist organization. [More..](#)

Journalist detained over tweets on May election results, February earthquakes

Journalist Mehmet Kızmaz was detained over tweets regarding the presidential and parliamentary elections in May and the February earthquakes. [More..](#)

2 Kurdish journalists convicted of libel, insult

Courts in eastern Turkey convicted Kurdish journalists Hacı Boğatekin, who was sentenced to prison, and Özgür Boğatekin, who received a suspended fine. [More..](#)

Former Zaman daily executive arrested on coup charges

An İstanbul court ruled for the arrest of journalist Mehmet Kamış, the deputy editor-in-chief of a now-closed newspaper in Turkey, on charges of attempting to overturn the constitutional order due to his alleged role in a failed coup in 2016. [More..](#)



Journalist Mehmet Kamış

79-year-old veteran journalist sent to prison

Prominent Turkish journalist Nazlı Ilıcak was sent to prison to serve a sentence handed down on conviction of libeling a public prosecutor. [More..](#)

Kurdish journalist sent to prison to serve sentence on terrorism charges

Journalist Sıddık Güler was arrested and sent to prison after his conviction on terrorism-related charges was upheld by the Supreme Court of Appeals. [More..](#)

Violence against journalists

VOA reporter called ‘provocateur’ for asking MHP chair about murder of former Grey Wolves president

Turkey’s far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) described as a “provocateur” a reporter from Voice of America’s Turkish edition who asked the party’s leader about the assassination of the former president of the party’s youth wing. [More..](#)

Journalist allegedly beaten, mistreated in police custody

Journalist Sedat Yılmaz, who was detained in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır, was allegedly mistreated and beaten while in police custody. He wasn’t given any food, and all his requests were denied by the police during his 15-hour trip to the capital. [More..](#)

Local journalist attacked in eastern Turkey after covering alleged irregularities in AKP municipality

Sinan Aygöl, a local journalist based in eastern Turkey, was attacked by two people connected to the mayor of an AKP-run municipality, which he had previously claimed was involved in irregularities. [More..](#)



Journalist Sinan Aygöl after he was assaulted by people connected to the ruling party

Social media and internet freedom

Turkish gov't restricted Twitter following deadly earthquakes

The Turkish government restricted Twitter on multiple internet providers following deadly earthquakes that killed tens of thousands in Turkey and Syria. [More..](#)

138 detained due to 'provocative' posts about earthquakes

Turkish prosecutors ordered the detention of 138 social media users due to "provocative" posts on social media about the earthquakes. [More..](#)

Turkish authorities blocked access to popular online debate forum

The Turkish Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK) barred access to popular online debate forum Ekşi Sözlük. [More..](#)

Turkish authorities banned access to 340 URLs and websites

A Turkish court blocked access to 340 websites and URLs, including news websites, blogs and social media accounts, at the request of the Security Directorate General. [More..](#)

Twitter succumbed to Erdoğan's pressure, silenced key voices on election eve

Ahead of the May presidential and parliamentary elections, Twitter announced that it was restricting access in Turkey to certain account holders to ensure the platform "remains available to the people of Turkey," seen by critics as giving in to the incumbent President Erdoğan. [More..](#)

Court banned access to 2021 report on internet censorship

A Turkish court banned access to the 2021 annual report of the Freedom of Expression Association's (İFÖD) EngelliWeb initiative, which focuses on the growing internet censorship in Turkey in 2021. [More..](#)

Turkey detained 27 X users on allegations of fomenting enmity, spreading disinformation

The police detained 27 people including a number of journalists on allegations of fomenting enmity and hatred and spreading disinformation on their X social media accounts. [More..](#)

Court banned online content upon demand from controversial jurist

A Turkish court imposed an access ban on 17 news reports concerning bribery allegations made by a mobster against a member of a top court that sparked a debate in Turkey about the shadowy relationship between the mafia and the judicial authorities. [More..](#)

8 arrested for fomenting enmity, spreading disinformation on social media

An Ankara court ordered the arrest of eight people including two journalists on charges of fomenting enmity and hatred and spreading disinformation on their X social media accounts. [More..](#)

Detention warrants issued for 23 people due to social media posts about Ankara bombing

Prosecutors issued detention warrants for 23 people over their messages on social media about a terrorist attack in Ankara that left two police officers injured. [More..](#)

X faced bandwidth reduction by half in Turkey

Social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, faced the possibility of a 50 percent bandwidth reduction in Turkey for its potential failure to comply with a Turkish social media law that requires platforms to designate a representative in the country. [More..](#)

Turkish judge accused of bribery had access blocked to 172 news reports about claims

Bekir Altun, an İstanbul judge who was named in previously revealed allegations regarding corruption in the Turkish judiciary, had access blocked to 172 news reports about the claims against him. [More..](#)

Turkey's spy chief had access blocked to hundreds of news articles, social media posts

İbrahim Kalın, head of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), had access blocked to hundreds of news articles, columns and social media posts about him. [More..](#)

Turkey blocked access to DW domains aimed at circumventing censorship

An Ankara court blocked access to two domains operated by Deutsche Welle to publish news after its Turkish service was censored by the authorities. [More..](#)

Reports revealed that Turkey requested removal of massive amount of online content from Google in 10 years

Turkish government agencies requested the removal of a total of 90,400 web pages and other content from Google in the last decade. [More..](#)

Turkey banned access to 16 VPN providers

The Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK) banned access to 16 VPN providers that were frequently used to circumvent government censorship. [More..](#)

Fines and discrimination against critical media



RTÜK continued to sanction media outlets over comments or news coverage

In January RTÜK ordered a suspension of three episodes of a TV5 program for hosting former national football player Hakan Şükür, who is sought by the Turkish government due to his links to the faith-based Gülen movement. [More..](#)

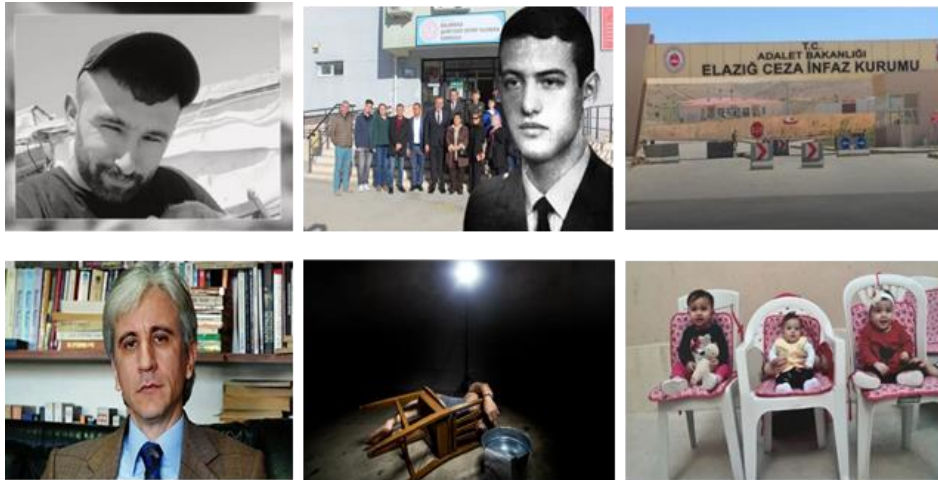
In the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes, RTÜK imposed fines and broadcasting bans on TV stations Tele 1, Halk TV and Fox TV for their coverage. [More..](#)

After the May presidential and parliamentary elections the agency imposed fines on four TV stations for violating broadcasting guidelines during their coverage of the elections. [More..](#)

In October, RTÜK imposed a five-time program ban as well as an upper limit fine on the government-critical Halk TV over comments made in news programs. [More..](#)

In November, the agency imposed sanctions on seven TV stations due to their content. [More..](#)

9. Torture, inhuman treatment and conditions in Turkish prisons



Turkey has experienced a marked resurgence of torture and ill-treatment in custody over the past seven years and especially since a coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Lack of condemnation from higher officials and a readiness to cover up allegations rather than investigate them have resulted in widespread impunity for the security forces.

The enormous gulf between Turkey's constitutional provisions for the protection of human rights and the grim reality on the ground continued to grow during the year. Several reports from rights groups addressed the issue of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and underlined the fact that some police officers, prison authorities and military and intelligence units employed these practices.

As part of a crackdown launched by President Erdoğan, Turkey has jailed tens of thousands of people on terrorism-related charges since July 2016. Most of them were merely critical of the government and had not engaged in any criminal activity. The crackdown caused overcrowding in prisons, resulting in situations where inmates were underfed and did not have beds or basic products for personal hygiene. Inmates who had landed in prison at an early age grew up in these circumstances and over time developed long-lasting health problems.

According to the Directorate General of Prisons and Detention Houses, Turkish prisons are holding [51,320 more prisoners](#) than their overall capacity. The official data revealed that Turkish prisons are holding 341,294 people, although they can safely accommodate only 289,974.

In December the ECtHR [faulted](#) Turkey for the poor prison conditions suffered by eight people who were given less than three square meters of living space in overcrowded prisons in the aftermath of the coup attempt.

The PACE [adopted](#) a resolution on torture and ill-treatment in places of detention across Europe, addressing the increase in alleged incidents reported from Turkey in past years. Initiated based on a report by Cypriot MP Constantinos Efsthathiou, the resolution named Turkey as among the countries where credible reports suggest that torture and ill-treatment tend to be systematic and/or widespread, along with Azerbaijan and Russia.

In June [22 prison staff members](#), comprising guards and two administrators, were detained on warrants issued by Turkish prosecutors for alleged torture and mistreatment of inmates and embezzlement of public funds.

In April 68 women incarcerated in Ankara's Sincan Prison in a letter [asked](#) the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to take immediate action on suspicious deaths in the country's prisons and to launch an investigation into them.

Prisoners in the provinces of southern Turkey hit by devastating earthquakes on February 6 faced [increased](#) mistreatment and rights abuses. In addition human rights activists and opposition politicians have frequently criticized authorities for not releasing seriously ill prisoners so they can seek proper treatment.

Here is some of the most important news from 2023 on torture, inhuman treatment and the conditions in Turkish prisons:

Ankara Bar published 5 censored reports on torture, ill-treatment of alleged Gülenists



The Ankara Bar Association published five reports by its human rights committee on allegations of torture made by detainees held at a police detention center that were previously censored by management and prompted the then-committee chair and several lawyers to resign. [More..](#)

22 prison staff members detained over alleged torture, mistreatment and embezzlement

Twenty-two prison staff members, comprising guards and two administrators, were detained on warrants issued by Turkish prosecutors for alleged torture and mistreatment of inmates and embezzlement of public funds. [More..](#)

520 children under the age of 6 in prison with their mothers in Turkey

A total of 520 children under the age of 6 are accompanying their mothers in Turkish prisons, according to a report released by main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) lawmaker Sezgin Tanrikulu. Turkish prisons host some 14,000 women, 470 of whom are accompanied by their children, the report said. [More..](#)

Ankara prosecutor's office refused to pursue case of female journalists allegedly strip-searched

A criminal complaint filed by female journalists who were detained in October 2022 and claimed to have been strip-searched at Sincan Prison in Ankara was declined by the city's chief public prosecutor's office. [More..](#)

IHD said conditions in Turkish prisons poor, human rights violations common

The Human Rights Association (IHD) said conditions in Turkish prisons were inhumane and that human rights violations had become worryingly common. According to the IHD, the prison population has skyrocketed in recent years under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government due to its crackdown on dissidents. As the number of prisoners has increased, so have human rights violations. [More..](#)

Mistreatment, rights violations increased in prisons in southern Turkey following devastating earthquakes

Prisoners in the provinces of southern Turkey hit by devastating earthquakes on February 6 faced increasing mistreatment and rights abuses, according to lawyers from the IHD. Lawyer Mehtap Sert, who visited inmates in a prison in Hatay, one of the cities hardest hit by the earthquakes, said the prison had not been heated since the disaster despite the cold and that inmates were receiving inadequate amounts of food and drinking water. [More..](#)



ECtHR faulted Turkey for poor prison conditions in post-coup period

The ECtHR faulted Turkey for the poor prison conditions suffered by eight people who were given less than three square meters of living space in overcrowded prisons in the aftermath of a failed coup in July 2016. The court combined the applications of 10 people in

Turkey who were all jailed in a widespread post-coup crackdown on non-loyalist citizens. [More..](#)

Post-coup victims attacked by inmates in eastern Turkey prison

Two inmates in a prison in eastern Turkey attacked eight other inmates arrested or convicted on charges of affiliation with the faith-based Gülen movement or the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The two inmates, who identified themselves as "men of the deep state," stabbed eight inmates in Elazığ High Security Prison No.1 in August, seriously injuring one of them.

[More..](#)

Kurdish politician allegedly strip-searched in western Turkey prison

The guards in an İzmir prison allegedly strip-searched and verbally assaulted Berna Çelik, a provincial executive of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) who had recently been arrested on terrorism-related charges.

[More..](#)

6 Turkish police officers indicted for torturing detainees

Istanbul prosecutors in November indicted six police officers on charges of torturing three people in their custody in 2022. The detainees were allegedly taken to a room without security cameras and physically mistreated. [More..](#)

School named after officer accused of torturing Kurds during 1980s military rule draws ire



The revelation that a primary school in the western province of İzmir was named after Esat Oktay Yıldiran, a military officer who was accused of torturing

Kurdish political prisoners following a 1980 military coup in Turkey, sparked a strong backlash across the country. [More..](#)

Elderly Kurdish prisoner beaten by guards for protesting racist remarks

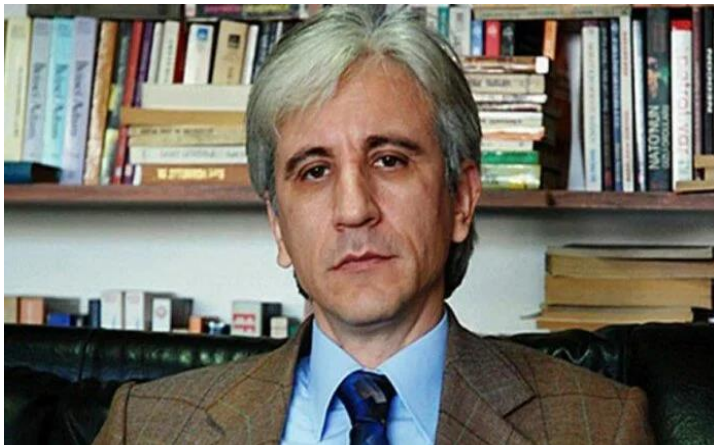
Cemal Gürsel Bizci, a 68-year-old Kurdish inmate in a prison in Turkey's western Manisa province, claimed he was beaten for objecting to racist remarks made by prison guards. Taken to a hospital after the incident, Bizci had wounds on the soles of his feet and was transferred to another prison in Manisa.. [More..](#)

Turkey acquitted police officer who allegedly impregnated a migrant woman in custody

An Ankara court acquitted a police officer accused of sexually assaulting a woman who was held at a migrant detention center. The officer, identified only by the initials M.Ş., was acquitted on the grounds that there was no concrete evidence supporting the victim's claim that she was coerced by the officer into having sexual relations. [More..](#)

Strip-search an ongoing practice in Edirne prison

Strip-search is an ongoing practice in a prison in the northwestern Turkish province of Edirne, human rights defender and opposition lawmaker Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu said. According to Gergerlioğlu, female inmates were ordered to undress and squat, and prison guards touched their breasts and other parts of their bodies. [More..](#)



Imprisoned Turkish jurist mistreated by prison guards

Gültekin Avcı, a former prosecutor and columnist incarcerated in Izmir, was allegedly mistreated by prison guards in September. The incident was made public by Gültekin's wife, who said her husband was kicked and shoved by guards for not

standing up during a ward count. [More..](#)

14 female inmates in Ankara prison not released despite completion of sentences

Fourteen female inmates at Sincan Women's Prison in Ankara were not released despite having served their sentences due to decisions on the part of the prison authorities, who cited their alleged lack of remorse as the reason. [More..](#)

Authorities at Ankara's Sincan Prison arbitrarily revoked parole rights of political prisoners

Prison authorities in Ankara's Sincan Prison arbitrarily revoked political prisoners' right to parole. According to prisoners, they were denied parole for reasons such as "reading too many books," "consuming too much water," "meeting with the prison imam" or "attending the open university while in prison." [More..](#)

Inmates went on a hunger strike to protest rights violations in prison in western Turkey

Six inmates in a prison in Turkey's western province of Afyonkarahisar went on a hunger strike in January to protest rights violations in the prison. After a prison visit, the families of the prisoners stated, "Our children are being tortured in prison. The safety of our children is at risk." [More..](#)

Inmates in western Turkey's Kütahya province provided 2 hours of water

Inmates in a prison in western Turkey's Kütahya province had limited access to water. The Parmakören T-type prison, a newly built prison complex, provided running water for only two hours a day. Families expressed outrage, saying inmates were unable to shower, clean their cells, use the toilet or even wash their dishes. [More..](#)

Investigation launched into suspicious death of Palestinian man in Turkish prison

A Turkish prosecutor launched an investigation into the suspicious death of Nabeel Hasan, a Palestinian national, in a Turkish prison less than a week after he was arrested for involvement in a fight in Istanbul's Başakşehir district. [More..](#)

UN revealed involvement of Turkish intelligence agents in torture sessions in Syria

A report issued by a United Nations commission on February 7, 2023 revealed the involvement of Turkish officials in the torture of victims who were arbitrarily detained in Syria by armed factions aligned with the Turkish armed forces. [More..](#)

Istanbul court sentenced 6 police officers to prison over death of detainee

A Turkish court in September sentenced six police officers to almost four years in prison for their involvement in the death of a detainee at an Istanbul police station. Birol Yıldırım, 42, died in police custody in Istanbul's Esenyurt neighborhood on June 5, 2021. CCTV recordings showed Yıldırım and two others speaking with policemen in front of the station. As Yıldırım turned to leave, several officers forced him into the police station. [More..](#)

3 inmates died, at least 9 injured in post-quake prison riots

Three inmates died and at least nine were injured in the suppression of prison riots in Turkey's Hatay and Kahramanmaraş provinces that were triggered by massive earthquakes on February 6. [More..](#)



3 gendarmes suspended on accusations of killing young man who allegedly looted a quake region liquor store

Three gendarmes who were accused of beating Ahmet Güreşçi to death in custody after he and his brother Sabri allegedly looted a liquor store in the southern Turkish province of Hatay, where devastating earthquakes hit the hardest in February, were

suspended from duty. [More..](#)

ÇHD report revealed improper practices in new maximum security prisons

Inmates in new maximum-security prisons in Turkey were forced into solitary confinement in violation of relevant regulations, according to a report by the Progressive Lawyers' Association. [More..](#)

Female inmates in Ankara called on CPT to take action on suspicious deaths of prisoners

Sixty-eight women who were incarcerated in Ankara's Sincan Prison had in a letter asked the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to take immediate action on suspicious deaths in the country's prisons and to launch an investigation into them. They said, as "political hostages" in Sincan Prison, they were concerned about the lives of inmates in solitary confinement. [More..](#)

10. Transnational repression



Since a coup attempt in July 2016, President Erdoğan's long arm has reached tens of thousands of Turkish citizens abroad. From spying through diplomatic missions and pro-government diaspora organizations to denial of consular services and outright intimidation and illegal renditions, the Turkish government has been using a wide range of tactics against its critics overseas. Turkey's efforts at transnational repression did not wind down in 2023.

The government's campaign has mostly relied on renditions, in which the government and its intelligence agency (MIT) persuade the relevant states to hand over individuals without due process, using various methods. The victims have suffered several human rights violations including arbitrary arrest, house raids, torture and ill-treatment during these operations.

According to a Freedom House [report](#) on global transnational repression, Ankara's campaign primarily targets people affiliated with the Gülen movement, but the efforts of the government have expanded to include Kurds and leftists as well. Another [report](#) recently published by Freedom House, revealed that Turkish authorities have committed 132 incidents, or 15 percent of the total, of direct, physical transnational repression since 2014, noting that Turkey has become the world's second most prolific perpetrator of transnational repression.

MIT [confirmed](#) in its annual report for 2022 that it had conducted operations for the forcible return of more than 100 people with alleged links to the Gülen movement. Then-vice president Fuat Oktay earlier [said](#) in a speech in parliament that Turkish agents had conducted "diplomacy" with their counterparts in countries where Turkish nationals were abducted.

In [a joint letter](#) in 2020 UN rapporteurs accused the Turkish government of engaging in the systematic practice of state-sponsored extraterritorial abductions and forcible returns, with at least 100 Turkish nationals renditioned from multiple states to Turkey. In several of these [cases](#) the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [concluded](#) that the arrest, detention and forced transfer to Turkey of Turkish nationals were arbitrary and in violation of international human rights norms and standards.

In June the PACE in its first [resolution](#) condemning all forms of transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights revealed the tactics of countries including Turkey to suppress their critics abroad. According to the resolution, the Turkish government's tactics rely on "renditions, abuse of extradition proceedings, Interpol Red Notices, anti-terror financing measures, and co-opting other States to deport or transfer persons unlawfully."

In its annual human rights report on Turkey for 2022, [analyzed](#) by SCF, the US State Department included the Turkish government's transnational repression tactics to suppress its critics living overseas. "The government engaged in a worldwide effort to apprehend suspected members of the Gulen movement. There were credible reports the government exerted bilateral pressure on other countries to take adverse action against specific individuals, at times without due process," the department's 2022 report said.

Abduction, rendition and forcible return of Erdoğan critics



Businessman illegally brought to Turkey from Iraq and arrested over Gülen links

Mehmet Cintosun, a Turkish businessman who was illegally brought to Turkey from Iraq by MİT, was arrested on terrorism charges due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement. Cintosun, who went missing in Erbil, Iraq, on January 29, was

revealed to be in police custody in Turkey when photos of him were made public by MİT on April 14. [More..](#)

Turkish national renditioned from Tajikistan over Gülen links

Emsal Koç, a Turkish national who was illegally brought to Turkey from Tajikistan, was arrested due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement. Koç, who went missing in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on June 2, was found to be in police custody in the eastern Turkish province of Erzurum when the police contacted his family living in the province in July.



Koç had been residing in Tajikistan since 1994 and had worked at a school affiliated with the Gülen movement, prior to 2017. He was forced to get into a black car by three men when he left the warehouse where he had been working since 2017. [More..](#)

Turkey's intel agency renditioned businessman from Tajikistan



Koray Vural, a Turkish businessman who had gone missing in Tajikistan in mid-September and was being sought by Turkey over his links to the Gülen movement, was renditioned by Turkey's intelligence agency.

The state-run Anadolu news agency (AA) on October 5 released a photo of Vural in handcuffs flanked by Turkish flags, reporting that he was abducted in Tajikistan and brought back to Turkey as part of a MiT operation. According to local reports, Vural was kidnapped by unknown persons in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe on Sept. 16. He had been missing for 20 days.

Graduating with a degree in English language teaching from Tajik State University, Vural also completed his doctorate in the country where he had been living for 29 years. Initially working as a teacher in Tajikistan, he later ventured into business and established the Özyurt Restaurant. [More..](#)

Opposition deputy and leading rights advocate Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu expressed concern that Vural might be suffering mistreatment in Turkey. Gergerlioğlu shared his thoughts on X, formerly Twitter, where he sent a tweet addressed to Nacho Sánchez Amor, the European Parliament's Turkey rapporteur. "On the heels of your statement that according to the government's narrative half of the country's population consists of terrorists, another citizen of Turkey has been abducted and forcibly disappeared," Gergerlioğlu tweeted. "Security officials insist on not making any comments on Koray Vural," he said, adding that "he is at risk of torture." [More..](#)

Turkey abducted two alleged Gülen followers from Algeria

MİT renditioned Mustafa Tan and Mustafa Bircan from Algeria as part of its international abduction campaign against alleged members of the Gülen movement. Tan and Bircan were handed over to the Ankara police after their rendition, AA reported.

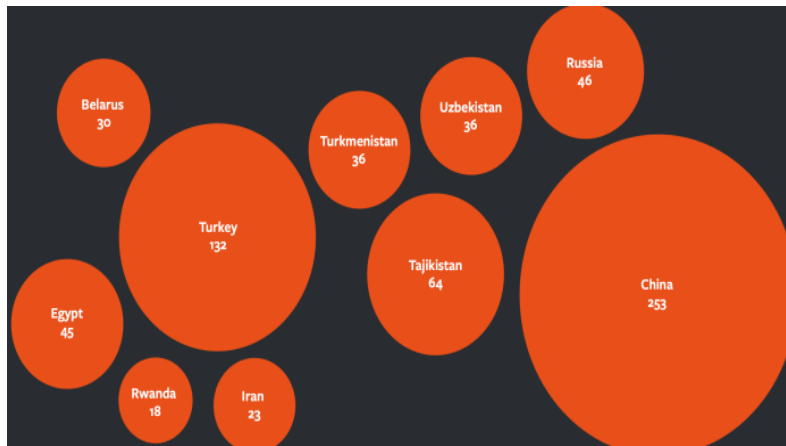


The two are accused of organizing the movement's presence in the North African country, according to the AA report. [More..](#)

Turkey's intelligence agency confirmed the abduction of more than 100 people with alleged links to Gülen movement

Turkey's intelligence agency confirmed in its yearly report that it had conducted operations for the forcible return of more than 100 people with alleged links to the Gülen movement. "... [M]ore than 100 members of the [Gülen movement] from different countries were brought to Turkey as a result of the [agency's] increased operational capacity abroad," MİT's 2022 report said. [More..](#)

132 incidents of direct, physical transnational repression perpetrated by Turkey since 2014



Freedom House

A report by Freedom House on transnational repression revealed that Turkish authorities have committed 132 incidents, or 15 percent of the total, of direct, physical transnational repression since 2014, noting that Turkey has become the world's second most

prolific perpetrator of transnational repression.

The report, titled "Still Not Safe: Transnational Repression in 2022," indicated that the Turkish government has relentlessly pursued exiles associated with the Gülen and Kurdish movements since 2014. [More..](#)

Turkey sought extradition of 1,269 from 112 countries over alleged Gülen links

Justice Minister Yılmaz Tunç in August said the Turkish government has sought the extradition of 1,269 people living in exile in 112 countries over alleged links to the Gülen movement.

Speaking to the pro-government A Haber private news channel, Tunç said the ministry has transmitted 1,387 extradition requests for 1,269 individuals. [More..](#)

Attacks and pressure on critics and journalists living abroad

Sweden refused to extradite 4 people on Turkey's list, including a former police chief

The Swedish government decided to reject a request from Turkey for the extradition of four Turkish citizens, including former police chief Murat Çetiner. Turkish authorities have demanded the extradition of 42 people, up from a previous 33, mostly political dissidents, as the main requirement for ratifying Sweden's NATO membership. [More..](#)

Turkish intelligence ordered assassination of exiled journalists Bozkurt and Güven



Independent journalist Erkam Tufan Aytav claimed on his YouTube program in January that a German woman of Turkish origin was ordered by Turkey's intelligence agency to kill journalists Abdullah Bozkurt and Cevheri Güven, both of whom are living in exile in Europe.

[More..](#)

Pro-Erdoğan daily targeted another Turkish journalist living in exile

Ekrem Dumanlı, a Turkish journalist living in exile in the United States, was targeted by a pro-government newspaper that revealed his home address and published secretly taken photos, in the latest episode of a manhunt being carried out for journalists who have been forced to flee Turkey and reside overseas. [More..](#)

Turkey among 26 countries behind acts of transnational repression against journalists

A recent report by Freedom House identified Turkey as one of 26 countries engaging in transnational repression targeting journalists since 2014.

As increasing attacks on independent media globally were forcing journalists to flee their home countries, the report, titled "A Light That Cannot Be Extinguished: Exiled Journalism and Transnational Repression," detailed how Turkey, among countries such as Belarus, Cambodia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Saudi Arabia, targeted journalists abroad with transnational repression, putting their safety and work in serious peril. [More..](#)

Turkey used journalists to silence critics in exile

The government of President Erdoğan, which clamped down on media freedom at home, co-opted journalists working at government-friendly news outlets into becoming tools of cross-border repression, according to Frankie Vetch at Coda Story. Vetch said such cooperation "allowed the state to reach outside Turkey's borders to intimidate journalists and dissidents who have sought refuge in Western Europe and North America." [More..](#)

Turkey demanded Sweden silence journalists, shut down news outlet to secure NATO bid approval

In the midst of prolonged and deliberately protracted negotiations between Turkey and Sweden concerning Ankara's endorsement of the Nordic nation's NATO membership bid, Turkish negotiators insisted that their Swedish

counterparts agree to the closure of Nordic Monitor, an investigative news website based in Stockholm managed by two exiled Turkish journalists. [More..](#)

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the Swedish Union of Journalists released a joint statement criticizing Turkey for its attempts. “We believe that the Turkish government is applying pressure on its Swedish counterpart by requesting the country’s NATO delegations to close the website, whose articles are sometimes critical of the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,” the statement said. [More..](#)

Erdoğan's long arm and international reaction against his global witch-hunt



Turkish Maarif Foundation signed MoU to take over Gülen-linked schools in Central African Republic

The Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMV), a state-run education body, signed a memorandum of understanding with Central African Republic (CAR) officials in February to take over schools in the country affiliated with the Gülen movement. According to the TMV, it had taken over 216

schools affiliated with the movement in 44 countries. [More..](#)

US State Department human rights report cited Albania's closure of Gülen-linked schools

The US State Department included Albania's decision to close two schools allegedly linked to the Gülen movement in its 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices published in March. The report cited the Albanian government's closure of the Mehmet Akif Ersoy girls high school and the Zübeyde Hanım kindergarten as examples of alleged human rights violations in the country, under a section titled “Discrimination and Societal Abuses.” [More..](#)

PACE revealed Turkey's tactics in its first resolution on transnational repression

PACE, in its first resolution condemning all forms of transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights, urged action against transnational repression and revealed tactics used by Turkey, Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan to suppress their critics living abroad. Approving a report in

June by Sir Christopher Chope (United Kingdom, EC/DA), the assembly expressed concern about Turkey's use of some tools of transnational repression, particularly following a July 2016 coup attempt and its relentless pursuit of anyone allegedly related to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)



World leaders committed to strengthening democracy, defending against transnational threats and repression

World leaders who gathered for an online democracy summit committed to bolstering democracy and combatting authoritarian trends, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and defending against transnational threats and repression. The second edition of the online Summit for Democracy 2023 was hosted by US President Joe Biden March 28-30. [More..](#)

US State Department started reporting on Turkey's transnational repression tactics

In its 2022 annual human rights report on Turkey, the US State Department included the Turkish government's transnational repression tactics to suppress its critics living abroad. The report identified the tactics as extraterritorial killing, kidnapping and forced returns; threats, harassment, surveillance and coercion; misuse of international law enforcement tools; and efforts to control mobility. [More..](#)

Former Kosovo intel chief sentenced to prison due to role in illegal deportation of Gülenists

In July a Kosovo court handed down a prison sentence of four years, eight months to Driton Gashi, the country's former intelligence chief, due to his role in the illegal deportation of six Turkish citizens from the country in 2018. Gashi was convicted of "abuse of official position or authority." The court also him from assuming any public position after serving his sentence. [More..](#)

11. Women's rights



The increase in rights violations against women in Turkey continued in 2023, with a rising number of femicide cases, bans on events organized by rights groups and detentions of women protesting gender-based violence.

Before the May 2023 general election, the ruling AKP sought an alliance with the conservative New Welfare Party (YRP), a small political party chaired by Fatih Erbakan. One of the YRP's demands for joining the People's Alliance led by President Erdoğan was the repeal of Law No. 6284 for protection of the family and the prevention of violence against women.

While the Turkish government has agreed to consider repealing the law, activists across the country expressed outrage, saying it was the only legal measure against gender-based violence.

In 2023 femicides and violence against women remained serious problems in Turkey, where women are killed, raped or beaten every day. Many critics say the main reason for the situation has been the policies of the Turkish government, which protects violent and abusive men by granting them impunity. According to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu), at least 315 women were murdered by men and 248 women died under suspicious circumstances during the year.

In addition, rights activists criticized courts handing down reduced sentences to perpetrators of gender-based violence on the grounds that they were "provoked," saying it created a culture of impunity. Article 29 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) has often been used to reduce sentences for men accused of such crimes on the grounds that the victim provoked the murder with her actions.

Here is some of the most important news from 2023 in the field of women's rights:

Top court refused to annul Turkey's Istanbul Convention withdrawal

The highest body of the Council of State, Turkey's top administrative court, ruled that a decision by its 10th Chamber to reject a request to annul Turkey's withdrawal from a European convention against gender-based violence was "lawful." Rights groups and Western governments expressed shock and outrage when Turkish President Erdoğan withdrew Turkey from the Istanbul Convention in an overnight decree in 2021. But the 10th Chamber of the Council of State rejected a request to annul Erdoğan's decision in July, arguing that since the president has the authority to approve international treaties after they are ratified by parliament, the legislature did not need to take any action for the president to exercise his authority to withdraw from treaties. [More...](#)

Turkey banned Women's Day march in central Istanbul

A district governor's office in Istanbul declared the central Taksim neighborhood and surrounding area off limits for demonstrations or marches



to mark International Women's Day. The Beyoğlu district governor's office said no meetings, protests, marches or demonstrations could be held in venues or streets in the area including Taksim Square. It said the planned Women's Day march has been banned out of concerns for public order and national security as well as to

prevent crime and protect the rights and freedoms of others. [More...](#)

Turkish police broke up Int'l Women's Day march, detained at least 10 in Istanbul

Turkish police used pepper spray to disperse hundreds of women who had gathered in Istanbul's Taksim neighborhood for the 21st Feminist Night March on the occasion of International Women's Day and detained at least 10 of them. The women gathered in İstiklal Street despite a ban imposed by the Beyoğlu district governor's office for all kinds of demonstrations and marches in the area including the women's day march. [More...](#)

97,721 women tried on terrorism charges, 23,000 dismissed from civil service in Turkey since 2016: report

A total of 97,721 women have been tried on charges of terrorism and 23,202 women have been dismissed from the civil service since a July 15, 2016 coup

attempt in Turkey, according to a report published by the CrossBorder Jurists Association (CBJ) on March 7. [More...](#)

175,000 women faced risks to pregnancies due to lack of medical care in Turkey's quake zone: report

The more than 175,000 pregnant women living in southern and southeastern Turkey when two major earthquakes struck the area in February faced serious problems in accessing maternal healthcare services, according to a report by the Women's Platform for Equality (EŞİK), an umbrella organization of over 340 women's and LGBTQ organizations. [More...](#)

Threats to women's rights can no longer be discussed within the AKP, said MP Özlem Zengin

Özlem Zengin, a deputy from the ruling AKP and notorious for discriminatory remarks against women critical of the Turkish government, complained on a television program that it had become impossible to discuss women's rights in her party. [More...](#)



Women were left vulnerable to physical and sexual violence in earthquake zones, according to activists

Activists said twin earthquakes that hit southern and southeastern Turkey in early February left women vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. Several women's organizations went to the earthquake zone immediately after the quakes struck to deliver aid to victims and show solidarity with women who were left homeless. The volunteers visited tent cities to determine women's needs and take note of the problems they were experiencing. [More...](#)

Gender gap in Turkish parliament to remain, parties' candidate lists revealed

The parliamentary candidate lists of 26 political parties for the May 14 general election revealed that the gender gap in the Turkish parliament would remain. [More...](#)

AKP members targeted award-winning actress for pro-women's-rights speech

Members of Turkey's ruling AKP targeted award-winning actress Merve Dizdar for a speech she gave about women's rights at the Cannes Film Festival. [More...](#)

World Economic Forum ranked Turkey among the worst in global index on gender equality

A report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Turkey 129th among 146 countries as regards gender equality. The “Global Gender Gap 2023” report indicated that Turkey had dropped five places in the global ranking in comparison to last year. Moreover, Turkey ranked the worst in gender equality in the Middle East and Eurasia category. [More...](#)

136 women in Turkey fell victim to femicide in the first half of 2023



A total of 136 women were murdered by men in Turkey in the first six months of 2023, while 114 died under suspicious circumstances.

Although femicides took place mainly in big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, there was an increase in domestic violence cases across the country. Women's rights activists also criticized the authorities for failing to conduct thorough

investigations into suspicious deaths. [More...](#)

Turkey acquitted police officer who allegedly impregnated a migrant woman in custody

An Ankara court acquitted a police officer accused of sexually assaulting a woman who was held at a migrant detention center. The officer, identified only by the initials M.Ş., was acquitted on the grounds that there was no concrete evidence supporting the victim's claim that she was coerced by the officer into having sexual relations. [More...](#)

Turkish women's rights activists criticized reduced sentences on grounds of 'provocation' in gender-based violence cases: report

Turkish women's rights activists criticized courts handing down reduced sentences to perpetrators of gender-based violence on the grounds that they were “provoked,” saying it created a culture of impunity. Lawyer Selin Nakıpoğlu from the Women's Platform for Equality (ESIK) said by issuing reduced sentences based on provocation, the courts were saying victims deserved to be killed or hurt. Women's rights activists said the law should be amended because it does not clarify what exactly can be considered a provocation. [More...](#)

Turkish court dropped case against women's rights group fighting femicide

A Turkish court rejected a prosecutor's attempt to shut down a leading women's rights group that fights against femicide on charges of violating administrative laws and "morality." The rare court victory for a Turkish rights group came as Ankara vowed to repair ties with Western allies after May elections in which President Erdoğan extended his rule into a third decade. [More...](#)

Turkish Medical Association condemned gender-based violence in new statement

The Turkish Medical Association (TTB) issued a statement condemning gender-based violence and femicide, calling on Turkish authorities to take action against the increasing cases. Following separate attacks on two female healthcare workers in Mersin province, the TBB blamed government policies and a culture of impunity in the judiciary that protects perpetrators of violence by handing down reduced sentences. [More...](#)

Former governor acquitted of gender-based violence charges despite evidence



Orhan Çiftçi, the former governor of Kırklareli province, was acquitted of domestic violence charges despite compelling evidence against him. He was accused of taking his ex-girlfriend to a forest by force and beating her with the participation of three other men. The incident took place in 2017, and the prosecutor presented camera recordings,

historical traffic search (HTS) data and expert reports that supported the accusations against Çiftçi and his friends. Furthermore, the victim, M.Ö., presented a medical report confirming the bruises on her body as evidence that she had been beaten. [More...](#)

Turkish women's rights activists said sexual and physical abuse perpetrators are granted impunity

Women's rights activists in Turkey said perpetrators of gender-based violence, femicide and sexual abuse are granted impunity thanks to reduced prison sentences. According to the activists, at least 17 perpetrators were given reduced prison sentences in the first nine months of 2022. Some of these cases involved the sexual abuse of underage girls. Canan Güllü, chair of the Federation of Turkish Women's Associations, said such reduced sentences have resulted in an increase of physical and sexual abuse cases. [More...](#)

Government agency revealed millions of women had been victims of violence in Turkey in the last decade

A violence prevention and monitoring center in Turkey reported staggering numbers of gender-based violence cases in the last decade. Violence prevention and monitoring center ŞÖNİM, which was established by the Ministry of Family and Social Services to combat gender-based violence, documented 1,360,027 gender-based violence cases in Turkey between 2013 and 2023. According to ŞÖNİM data, 15 women are victims of violence every hour. [More...](#)

New Turkish TV series sparked outrage for romanticizing femicide

A new Turkish television series developed by renowned actor Yılmaz Erdoğan sparked public criticism for promoting gender-based violence and femicide. Members of the public took to social media to criticize the series' first trailer, saying it romanticizes femicide. The trailer of "Pear Drops" was posted with the caption, "It was my destiny to not only be your love, but to also be the perpetrator of your murder." The series concerns the murder of a female teacher at the hands of her husband, played by Erdoğan. In the trailer as the perpetrator is taken to prison, a slow, romantic song plays in the background. [More...](#)