



Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note

## Turkey: Kurds

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Assessment</b> .....	<b>5</b>
About the assessment .....	5
1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals .....	5
1.1 Credibility.....	5
1.2 Exclusion.....	5
2. Convention reason(s) .....	6
3. Risk.....	6
3.1 Risk from the state .....	6
3.2 Risk from non-state actors.....	8
4. Protection .....	9
5. Internal relocation .....	10
6. Certification.....	10
<b>Country information</b> .....	<b>11</b>
About the country information.....	11
7. Legal provisions and monitoring bodies.....	11
7.1 Legal and constitutional framework, including anti-discrimination legislation.....	11
7.2 Human rights monitoring bodies.....	14
8. Kurdish population .....	15
8.1 Map: areas of majority Kurdish settlement .....	15
8.2 Timeline of key events with an impact on Kurdish issues.....	15
8.3 Background and recent history.....	15
8.4 Demography.....	18
8.5 Nationality.....	20
8.6 Religion .....	21
8.7 Likelihood of being identified as a Kurdish person .....	21
8.8 Kurdish political views .....	22
9. Daily life .....	23
9.1 Kurdish language .....	23
9.2 Kurdish language in education and culture.....	26
9.3 Attitude to education.....	27
9.4 Employment .....	28
9.5 Accommodation.....	31
9.6 Medical care .....	31

9.7 Women .....	32
9.8 Societal discrimination.....	33
10. State treatment of Kurds.....	35
10.1 Kurds in public life .....	35
10.2 Conflation with the PKK.....	37
10.3 Approach of the government and others in authority .....	39
10.4 Freedom of assembly .....	39
10.5 Newroz celebrations .....	41
10.6 Journalists and publishing .....	42
10.7 Civil society and cultural rights .....	44
10.8 Government human rights violations .....	45
10.9 Internally displaced persons (IDPs).....	46
10.10 Curfews .....	48
10.11 Numbers detained in connection with counter-terrorism .....	49
10.12 Treatment in detention .....	50
10.13 Conditions of release from detention.....	52
10.14 Judicial system.....	53
10.15 Military service .....	54
<b>Research methodology.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Terms of Reference.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Sources cited.....	57
Sources consulted but not cited.....	61
<b>Version control and feedback .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Feedback to the Home Office .....	62
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.....	62

# Executive summary

In general, any discrimination faced by Kurds does not, by its nature or repetition, even when taken cumulatively, amount to a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Kurds make up the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in Turkey, estimated to number around 15 million (approximately 18-20% of the Turkish population). The Turkish government does not recognise the Kurds as a minority group; only non-Muslim minorities have official minority status. Kurds traditionally have resided in the southeast of Turkey where they form the majority ethnic group. In recent decades, significant Kurdish populations have settled in Istanbul and other major cities in western Turkey where they are generally afforded greater economic opportunities than in the southeast, and where a Kurdish middle class is growing. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim but there are also Kurdish Alevi Shi'a Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi communities.

Turkish law states that all individuals are equal, regardless of race, language, and other factors. However, there is evidence of both state and societal discrimination towards Kurds based on their ethnicity. In the past discriminatory practices have historically had some impact on the ability of some Kurds to speak Kurdish in public, and obtain senior employment positions; but many members of the current government's cabinet are of Kurdish descent and Turkey has previously had at least one president of partial Kurdish descent. The government has prohibited some Kurdish gatherings from taking place and has adopted limiting measures at others. However, in general, Kurds can participate normally in both private and civic life. The public celebration of the significant Kurdish cultural festival of Newroz (Spring Equinox) has been permitted to take place in recent years, albeit under close supervision from the Turkish authorities.

Where a person has established a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities, nor will they likely be able to relocate to escape that risk. However, Kurds are unlikely to be able to establish a well-founded fear of persecution from the state on the basis of ethnicity alone.

Where the person has established a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, they will, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities, and/or relocate to escape that risk.

Where a claim based solely on Kurdish ethnicity is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

[Back to Contents](#)

# Assessment

## About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is information in the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state or non-state actors because they are of Kurdish ethnicity
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave is likely, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

### 1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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[Back to Contents](#)

### 1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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[Back to Contents](#)

## 2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Race.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 3. Risk

### 3.1 Risk from the state

- 3.1.1 In general, any discrimination faced by Kurds does not, by its nature or repetition, even taken cumulatively, amount to a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 The Kurds are an ethnic group of 25 to 35 million people who live mainly in a mountainous area extending across the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Armenia. An estimated 15 million Kurds live in Turkey (approximately 18-20% of the population). The Kurdish people have maintained their own language, culture and a keen sense of identity, despite not having their own state. Turkish Kurds are concentrated in the southeast of the country, but large numbers have relocated to the cities of the west, including Ankara and Istanbul (see [Background and recent history](#), [Demography](#)).
- 3.1.3 The Turkish government has historically sought to limit Kurdish influence and identity in part to protect Turkey's territorial integrity, unitary status of the state and maintain political stability. Against this, the Kurds have long sought greater cultural and political freedoms. This clash of interests and aims has resulted in discrimination and periods of violence. In 1984, the PKK carried out its first armed attack against Turkish state security services, leading to a protracted conflict that saw the evacuation of over 3,000 Kurdish villages in the south-east and the displacement of 1 to 3 million people. The conflict has resulted in approximately 40,000 deaths and is still ongoing, although civilian

deaths have continued to decline in recent years (see [Background and recent history](#), [Demography](#) and the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#) for further information).

- 3.1.4 The Constitution states that all individuals are equal, regardless of language, race or other factors and that all citizens are 'Turks.' There is no law preventing Kurds from obtaining public or private sector employment, participating in public life or accessing services; in general, Kurds are able to exercise these rights. However, the extent to which a Kurdish person may do so depends on individual circumstances and geographical location. Some Kurds conceal or downplay their Kurdish identity to avoid limits being placed on their employment opportunities. Although a Kurdish middle class is growing in urban areas, particularly in the west of Turkey, Kurds in the less-developed and conflict-affected south-east of the country have previously had reduced access to government services and fewer opportunities than those living in the west, though a recent surge in state investment and incentives have begun to improve conditions (see [Demography](#), [Nationality](#), [Kurds in public life](#) and [Employment](#)).
- 3.1.5 Turkish is the country's official language and the Constitution states that no other language may be the main language of instruction in educational institutions, which puts Kurdish pupils who may not speak Turkish at a disadvantage. The use of languages other than Turkish has sometimes been restricted in government and public services and many Kurdish-language schools that were closed by the government in 2016 and 2017 remained closed. However, the ban on Kurdish languages, instituted after a military coup in 1980, has gradually been lifted since the early 2000's. It may be taught as a primary language of instruction for some university programmes and in private schools, and Kurdish may also be chosen as an optional course of study in public schools. A state controlled Kurdish language television news channel was also established in 2008. Sources indicate a continued intolerance for the use of the Kurdish language in culture, with the authorities preventing numerous Kurdish performances in southeastern and other parts of Turkey, with some artists being arrested. The government's prohibition of several letters from the Kurdish alphabet prevents Kurds from giving their children Kurdish names. Kurdish-held local administrations, however, have made progress with Kurdish names of villages and streets appearing on road signs, albeit lacking in legal basis (see [Kurdish language](#) and [Kurdish language in education and culture](#)).
- 3.1.6 Sources indicate that while some of the Kurdish population support the PKK's ideology and methods, many are opposed. Conservative Kurds have, at times, given significant support to the government's ruling AK Party, which has several Kurdish MPs. The number of Kurds who continue to support the AKP, while decreasing, remains sizeable. The left-wing social democratic HDP also has significant support from Kurds (see [Kurdish political views](#)).
- 3.1.7 Sources indicate that the government may have exerted pressure upon, or attempted to ban, some pro-Kurdish parties, as well as prosecuting and incarcerating some of the parties' members. Of the democratically-elected Kurdish mayors who were removed from office and detained on the basis of alleged links to the PKK, some remain in detention. However, Kurds have

been, and continue to be, represented in politics (see [Kurds in public life](#)).

- 3.1.8 Many large gatherings relating to Kurdish issues or opposition groups were prohibited on security grounds. However, Newroz celebrations, often seen as linked to Kurdish separatism, were largely permitted in 2022 and 2023, albeit with a heavy police presence. Some attendees at those celebrations were met with disproportionate measures to limit the events, including the use of rubber bullets, pressurised water, pepper gas, and forceful, albeit short-lived, detentions (see [Freedom of assembly](#) and [Newroz celebrations](#)).
- 3.1.9 In 2022, the government prosecuted or detained tens of journalists working in Kurdish-language journalism, and many have been charged with terrorism-related or other anti-state offences and/or sentenced to up to 40 years imprisonment at the end of 2022. Nearly all Kurdish-language newspapers, television channels and radio stations remained closed on security grounds under government decrees. Many Kurdish civil society organisations, which were shut down by the government following the coup attempt of 2016, remained closed. Despite ongoing restrictions, civil society groups that remain active continue to monitor and be vocal about the situation (see [Journalists and publishing](#) and [Civil society and cultural rights](#)).
- 3.1.10 Some lawyers prefer not to represent Kurds in cases against the government, but there are lawyers who offer their services to Kurdish people. Translators must be provided in court if a person cannot speak Turkish (see [Judicial system](#)).
- 3.1.11 Sources indicate that while civilians in the heavily Kurdish-populated southeast continue to be impacted by the ongoing conflict between the government and the PKK, the risk to those civilians is much lower than in previous years. The use of government-imposed curfews also decreased significantly from 2019, albeit they are still experienced by some predominantly Kurdish communities to facilitate counter-PKK operations. Abductions, forced disappearances, and ill-treatment in police custody and prison continue to be reported and not investigated properly (see [Government human rights violations](#) and [Curfews](#)).
- 3.1.12 The conflict, earthquake, and the government-imposed construction of the Ilisu dam, caused significant internal displacement within and from southeastern Turkey, of up to 3.5 million people. Many have been unable to return to their homes (see [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#)).
- 3.1.13 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 3.2 Risk from non-state actors

- 3.2.1 It is unlikely that the level of societal discrimination would be sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, as to amount to serious harm or persecution. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.2.2 Although Kurds may participate in all areas of public life, and some have reached senior positions, they tend to be under-represented in leadership roles and may be reluctant to reveal their Kurdish ethnicity in case it proves a hindrance (see [Employment](#)).



- 3.2.3 Women are generally treated less favourably than men in Turkish society, and this phenomenon applies equally to Kurdish women. There is a helpline for women dealing with domestic abuse, with assistance available in Kurdish and Arabic and Turkish, although Kurdish is not one of the 6 advertised languages of a smartphone app designed for a similar purpose. Kurdish women can be provided with a translator in police stations and courts. Ethnically Kurdish women may be less educated than other Turkish women, and while underage marriage is an issue in many areas of Turkey, rates are particularly high in the east and southeast of Turkey. Arranged marriage is common amongst Kurds, but is becoming less so; parental/family approval may be sought among more conservative Kurds, but this is occurring less frequently otherwise (see [Women](#)).
- 3.2.4 There is evidence of continued societal discrimination towards Kurds and numerous reports of racist attacks against Kurdish people in 2023. In some cases, these attacks may not have been properly investigated or may not have been recognised as racist. Kurds living in cities in western Turkey may feel fearful about disclosing their Kurdish identity or speaking Kurdish in public, and employment opportunities may be limited for Kurdish people, particularly if they are active in Kurdish politics or vocal about their support for the Kurdish cause. However, most non-politically active Kurds, and those who support the AKP can live without discrimination in the cities of western Turkey. There is some evidence that Kurds may have been denied access to some rental accommodation due to their ethnicity. Kurds who do not speak Turkish may experience some difficulty in accessing medical services (see [Likelihood of being identified as a Kurdish person](#) and [Daily life](#)).
- 3.2.5 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities. However, Kurds are unlikely to be able to establish a well-founded fear of persecution from the state on the basis of ethnicity alone.
- 4.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection. This is likely to be available. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 4.1.3 Some Kurds may be reluctant to report incidents due to a low level of trust in the police. This is not the same as the state's unwillingness to provide protection. Similarly corruption, sympathy, or the weakness of some within the justice system does not mean the state is unwilling to afford protection.
- 4.1.4 The Constitution states that all individuals are equal, regardless of language, race, or other factors. A person may be imprisoned for up to three years for hate speech or 'injurious acts' related to language, race, nationality, colour, political opinion, or philosophical belief, amongst other things. Turkey is party to most international human rights instruments, but the legal framework still needs to be brought in line with the European Convention on Human Rights

and the caselaw of the European Court of Human Rights. The European Commission reported backsliding in the areas of freedom of assembly and association, the civil society environment, and the judicial system, and sources indicate that discrimination, hate speech and hate crime against minorities have continued. It also reported that the judiciary is not independent (see [Legal and constitutional framework, including anti-discrimination legislation](#)).

- 4.1.5 However, there are legal and administrative ways to complain about discrimination, which is prohibited under the law. The National Human Rights and Equality Institution (NHREI) and the Ombudsman are the main bodies working on the promotion and enforcement of human rights, and complaints are made to both bodies. In October 2022, the European Commission stated that the effectiveness of both institutions remains very limited. It also expressed concern that no revisions were made to make either institution operationally, structurally, or financially independent, nor to the system for appointing their members. The European Commission additionally noted that no progress was made to bring the NHREI's practices in line with the Paris Principles (a set of international standards which frame and guide the work of National Human Rights Institutions) (see [Human rights monitoring bodies](#)).
- 4.1.6 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 Where the risk faced is from a non-state actor, internal relocation is likely to be reasonable. There are Kurdish communities throughout Turkey and Turkish citizens are free to move throughout the country.
- 5.1.3 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation, taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 5.1.4 See also the Country Policy and Information Note on Turkey: Background note, including actors of protection and internal relocation.
- 5.1.5 For more on internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim based solely on Kurdish ethnicity is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

# Country information

## About the country information

This contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content of this section follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 10 August 2023

## 7. Legal provisions and monitoring bodies

### 7.1 Legal and constitutional framework, including anti-discrimination legislation

7.1.1 On 28 April 2023, the United Nations (UN) published a report which was submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) by the Government of Türkiye (GoT) on 3 August 2022. The report stated:

‘According to Article 10 of the Constitution “Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds...The State has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice.” As per the Constitution, minorities are defined and recognized by the bilateral and multilateral agreements to which Türkiye is a party. Minority rights are governed by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923. Pursuant to the Constitution and the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkish nationals belonging to minority groups enjoy same rights with other nationals and also benefit from their minority status.

‘...According to the Law, political parties cannot aim for creating a distinction on language, race, color, religion and sect or establishing a State order in any way based on these concepts or opinions (Article 78), regionalism or racism (Article 82) or seek purposes contrary to principle of equality before the law (Article 83).

‘In Turkish Civil Law, Labor Law, National Education Principal Law, Radio and Television Law, Law on Social Services and Law on HREIT [Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye] among others, non-discrimination measures are envisaged.

‘...“Hatred and Discrimination” offense is regulated in Article 122 of TPC [The Penal Code]. Accordingly, any person who (a) prevents the sale, transfer or rental of a movable or immovable property offered to the public, (b) prevents a person from enjoying services offered to the public, (c) prevents a person from being recruited for a job, (d) prevents a person from undertaking an ordinary economic activity on the ground of hatred based on differences of language, race, nationality, colour, sex, disability, political view, philosophical belief, religion or sect shall be sentenced to a penalty of

imprisonment for a term of one year to three years.’<sup>1</sup>

7.1.2 The same source also stated that:

‘On 15 July 2016, FETO [Fetullah Terrorist Organization], who had infiltrated many institutions of the State, attempted to eliminate the democratic Constitutional order using violence and coercion.

‘...In order to completely eliminate the threats against the existence of the State and the values of democratic society, to protect human rights and the rule of law and to prevent and eradicate future attacks on these values, SoE [State of Emergency] was declared on 21 July 2016 and approved by TGNA [Turkish Grand National Assembly] in accordance with Article 120 of the Constitution.

‘...Under SoE, Türkiye resorted to its right to derogate from its obligations in ICCPR [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] and ECHR [European Convention on Human Rights]. When exercising this right, exceptional, proportionate, necessary and temporary measures were taken in accordance with Article 4 of ICCPR and the principles outlined by General Comment no.29 of HRC [Human Rights Committee]. These measures did not cause changes or restrictions in everyday life and did not affect exercising of fundamental rights and freedoms. No measure was taken on the non-derogable rights and the right to a fair trial was respected.

‘...All Decree-Laws and decisions to extend SoE were duly approved by TGNA. The Decree-Laws that were subject to political supervision of TGNA were also subjected to judicial supervision of the CCt [Constitutional Court] as soon as they became laws with the approval of Parliament. The CCt examined and annulled a number of provisions in this regard.

‘...SoE was lifted on 18 July 2018. Derogation notice from ICCPR and ECHR was duly withdrawn on the same date.’<sup>2</sup>

7.1.3 On 10 October 2022, the European Commission published a report entitled ‘Türkiye 2022 Report’, covering the period from June 2021 to June 2022<sup>3</sup>, and which stated:

‘The constitutional architecture continued to centralise powers at the level of the Presidency without ensuring the sound and effective separation of powers between the executive, legislative and the judiciary. In the absence of an effective checks and balances mechanism, the democratic accountability of the executive branch continues to be limited to elections.

‘Despite the lifting of the state of emergency in July 2018, some legal provisions granting government officials extraordinary powers and retaining several of the restrictive elements of the state of emergency remained in place...In July 2021, Türkiye’s Parliament adopted a bill that extends the duration of some of the restrictive elements of the state of emergency for one more year.

‘...In addition, the emergency decree-laws were used to reform other

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<sup>1</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, ‘[...periodic report submitted by Türkiye...](#)’ (para17,43,57), 3 August 2022

<sup>2</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, ‘[...periodic report submitted by Türkiye...](#)’ (para 59-65), 3 August 2022

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p4, footnote 3), 12 October 2022

legislations.’<sup>4</sup>

7.1.4 The same source also stated that:

‘The legal framework includes general guarantees of respect for human and fundamental rights, but the legislation and its implementation need to be brought into line with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case-law. The Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly continued to monitor Türkiye’s respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Türkiye’s continued refusal to implement certain ECtHR rulings...is a source of serious concern regarding the judiciary’s adherence to international and European standards and Türkiye’s commitment to promote the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights.

‘...Türkiye is a party to most international human rights instruments; however, the deterioration of the human rights situation in practice continued.

‘...Türkiye has not yet signed the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe continued its full monitoring procedure.

‘In the reporting period, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) delivered 621 judgments and found violations of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in 70 cases relating mainly to freedom of expression, the right to liberty and security, protection of property, the right to fair trial, the right to free elections, respect for private and family life and the right to life. During the reporting period, 9,856 new applications were allocated to a decision body of the ECtHR. In June 2022, the total number of Turkish applications pending before the Court was 17,006. There are currently 188 cases against Türkiye under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers.’<sup>5</sup> However, the report did not state how many of those violations and cases related to Kurdish persons or issues.

7.1.5 The same source also stated that: ‘Legislation to combat hate crime, including hate speech, is still not in line with international standards and it does not cover hate offences on the basis of sexual orientation, ethnicity, age or gender identity. No progress was made towards the ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems.’<sup>6</sup>

7.1.6 On 20 March 2023, the United States Department of State (USSD) published a report entitled ‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’, covering events in 2022, which stated: ‘The law provides for punishment of up to three years in prison for conviction of “hate speech” or injurious acts related to language, race, nationality, color, gender, disability, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, or sectarian differences. Human rights

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p4,11), 12 October 2022

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p6,30-31), 12 October 2022

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p41), 12 October 2022



groups noted the law was used more to restrict freedom of expression than to protect members of minority groups.<sup>7</sup>

- 7.1.7 For information about anti-terrorism legislation, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 7.2 Human rights monitoring bodies

- 7.2.1 The GoT's 3 August 2022 submission to the UNHRC, published on 28 April 2023, stated: 'HRAP [Human Rights Action Plan] was announced on 2 March 2021 with "Free Individual, Strong Society; More Democratic Türkiye" vision. Prepared with a participatory spirit, having received opinions from local stakeholders including NGOs and professional organizations, academics and members of the media, as well as CoE and EU...'<sup>8</sup>

- 7.2.2 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated:

'On the promotion and enforcement of human rights, the implementation of the March 2021 human rights action plan continued. There is no evidence-based assessment of the implementation of the human rights action plan and the annual monitoring report which was due in March 2022 is not yet available to the public. The human rights action plan did not include measures to address critical issues underpinning the worrying human rights situation in Türkiye and the lack of independence of the judiciary.

'The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (HREI) and the Ombudsman are the main human rights institutions. The Ombudsman only processes complaints against the actions of the public administration and has no ex-officio powers while the HREI only accepts cases which fall outside the Ombudsman's remit. No revisions were made to improve the operational, structural or financial independence of either institution and the system for appointing their members stayed the same. The HREI has applied for accreditation to the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions despite no progress made to comply with the Paris principles on which the accreditation is based.

'The effectiveness of both institutions remains very limited.'<sup>9</sup>

- 7.2.3 On 12 October 2022, the Council of Europe - Parliamentary Assembly (CoE-PACE) published a report entitled 'The honouring of obligations and commitments by Türkiye' which stated: 'In April 2017, the Parliamentary Assembly decided to place Türkiye under the monitoring procedure.

'...The Assembly remains at the disposal of the authorities to pursue a constructive dialogue. It resolves, in the framework of the monitoring procedure for Türkiye, to continue to follow the developments in the country concerning democracy, the rule of law and human rights.'<sup>10</sup>

- 7.2.4 For more on human rights monitoring bodies, see the Home Office Fact-

<sup>7</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p34), 20 March 2023

<sup>8</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, '[...periodic report submitted by Türkiye...](#)' (para 8), 3 August 2022

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p32), 12 October 2022

<sup>10</sup> CoE-PACE, '[The honouring of obligations...by Türkiye](#)' (para 1,11), 12 October 2022

Finding Mission (HO FFM) report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 10 August 2023

## 8. Kurdish population

### 8.1 Map: areas of majority Kurdish settlement

8.1.1 Encyclopaedia Britannica published the following (undated) map showing areas of majority Kurdish settlement in southwestern Asia<sup>11</sup>:



[Back to Contents](#)

### 8.2 Timeline of key events with an impact on Kurdish issues

8.2.1 See Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#) for a timeline of key events from 1984 onwards.

[Back to Contents](#)

### 8.3 Background and recent history

8.3.1 On 15 October 2019, BBC News published an article entitled 'Who are the Kurds?' which stated:

'Between 25 and 35 million Kurds inhabit a mountainous region straddling the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Armenia. They make up the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, but they have never obtained a permanent nation state.

'...The Kurds are one of the indigenous peoples of the Mesopotamian plains and the highlands in what are now south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and south-western Armenia.

'Today, they form a distinctive community, united through race, culture and

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, '[Kurdish settlement in southwestern Asia](#)', undated

language, even though they have no standard dialect. They also adhere to a number of different religions and creeds, although the majority are Sunni Muslims.

‘...In the early 20th Century, many Kurds began to consider the creation of a homeland - generally referred to as "Kurdistan". After World War One and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the victorious Western allies made provision for a Kurdish state in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres.

‘Such hopes were dashed three years later, however, when the Treaty of Lausanne, which set the boundaries of modern Turkey, made no provision for a Kurdish state and left Kurds with minority status in their respective countries. Over the next 80 years, any move by Kurds to set up an independent state was brutally quashed.

‘...There is deep-seated hostility between the Turkish state and the country's Kurds, who constitute 15% to 20% of the population.

‘Kurds received harsh treatment at the hands of the Turkish authorities for generations. In response to uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s, many Kurds were resettled, Kurdish names and costumes were banned, the use of the Kurdish language was restricted, and even the existence of a Kurdish ethnic identity was denied, with people designated "Mountain Turks".<sup>12</sup>

8.3.2 In June 2018, the Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), an ‘international human rights organization working to secure rights for ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples around the world’<sup>13</sup>, published a report entitled ‘Kurds’ which stated:

‘Kurdish tribes enjoyed virtual autonomy until the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Fearful of the Armenian threat during World War I, Kurds cooperated in the Ottoman government’s genocide of one million Armenians, only to find themselves the target of forcible assimilation in the 1920s and 1930s. From the late 1950s, Kurdish immigration was initially voluntary and economic. But repeated Kurdish rebellions were suppressed with ruthlessness, bordering on genocide. All Kurdish expression was outlawed.

‘A few Kurds began to call for recognition in the 1960s, and a growing number identified with the Turkish left in the 1970s. In 1984 Kurdish nationalism found violent expression in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), which embarked on a guerrilla war against the state.

‘In tandem with this, the PKK also succeeded in mobilizing much of the Kurdish civilian population. The struggle has been partly a class one. Kurdish identity was infused with a sense of economic as well as political deprivation. The PKK deliberately targeted certain members of the Kurdish landlord class as accomplices with the system of oppression (though some landlords identified with the PKK, often for reasons of local rivalry). The PKK also targeted perceived agents of the Turkish state such as school-teachers.

‘With the outbreak of armed conflict in 1984 between the Turkish army and the PKK, more than 1 million Kurds were forcibly evicted from rural and urban areas in eastern and south-eastern Turkey. The displaced settled in

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<sup>12</sup> BBC News, [‘Who are the Kurds?’](#), 15 October 2019

<sup>13</sup> MRGI, [‘What We Do’](#), undated



urban centres in the region as well as towns in western and southern Turkey, and many fled to Europe. By 1996 the state only retained control of south-east Turkey through the forced evacuation of over 3,000 Kurdish villages, consequently causing the destitution of 3 million people, with widespread and routine arbitrary arrests and torture common.

‘A major factor in Turkey’s rapid urbanization in recent decades, especially the main cities in south-eastern Turkey, was the policy of village destruction, which was central to Turkey’s internal conflict against the PKK. By 1994, at least 3,000 villages had been deliberately destroyed as part of this campaign. The European Court of Human Rights gave judgment in a number of cases and established that Turkey had destroyed many villages as part of a military strategy. In this context, urban centres such as Diyarbakır experienced rapid growth, tripling in size during the 1990s even as many residents themselves moved elsewhere in Turkey or abroad to escape the violence. Though there is no consensus on how many exactly were displaced, reliable estimates range between 1 and 3 million.’<sup>14</sup>

### 8.3.3 The same source also stated that:

‘The Kurdish struggle for cultural and political rights is complicated by social and religious factors. Many rural Kurds are primarily motivated by clan or tribal loyalty, with long-standing local conflicts reflected in support for rival political parties at national level...The south-east remains underdeveloped compared with the western half of the country.

‘...While the conflict continued to exact a heavy death toll and displace hundreds of thousands of Kurdish civilians, the government also maintained a heavily discriminatory policy towards the community as a whole. This included the removal of Kurdish public officials, harassment of Kurdish political groups, targeting of Kurdish media outlets and the arrest of Kurdish politicians for holding party gatherings in Kurdish. The government also continued to conflate any effort to promote Kurdish rights, such as use of the Kurdish language, with support for “PKK terrorists”.’<sup>15</sup>

### 8.3.4 On 23 January 2019, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), ‘a research entity...that provides policy and legal analysis to committees and members of both chambers of the United States Congress’<sup>16</sup>, published a report entitled ‘The Kurds in Iraq, Turkey (Türkiye), Syria, and Iran’ which stated: ‘Historically, the Turkish government and military have sought to limit Kurdish influence and identity in Turkey, due in part to concerns about Turkish territorial integrity and political stability.’<sup>17</sup>

### 8.3.5 On 12 June 2023, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), ‘an independent, nonpartisan membership organization, think tank, and publisher’<sup>18</sup> published an article entitled ‘Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups’ by the Center for Preventive Action (CPA) which stated:

‘The ongoing conflict has resulted in nearly forty thousand deaths.

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<sup>14</sup> MRGI, ‘[Kurds](#)’, June 2018

<sup>15</sup> MRGI, ‘[Kurds](#)’, June 2018

<sup>16</sup> ecoi.net, ‘[Source description: Congressional Research Service \(CRS\)](#)’, 7 October 2019

<sup>17</sup> CRS, ‘[The Kurds in Iraq, Turkey \(Türkiye\), Syria, and Iran](#)’, 23 January 2019

<sup>18</sup> CFR, ‘[About CFR](#)’, undated

‘Under the Erdogan regime, popular discontent has steadily increased, as seen in the June 2013 Gezi park protests and a July 2016 coup attempt, but tensions have also risen between Turkish authorities and Kurdish groups. In particular, the PKK, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) (a left-wing pro-Kurdish party), and the People’s Protection Unit (YPG) (the armed wing of the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) with ties to the PKK) have increasingly agitated against the government, conducting numerous attacks against Turkish authorities in the southeast.

‘In July 2015, a two-year cease-fire between Turkey’s government and the PKK collapsed...’<sup>19</sup>

8.3.6 On 9 January 2023, the CRS published a report entitled ‘Turkey (Türkiye): Background and U.S. Relations’, citing various sources, which stated: ‘Under the state of emergency enacted after the failed July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey’s government cracked down on Turkey’s Kurdish minority.’<sup>20</sup>

8.3.7 For further information about the PKK and HDP, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#), [Turkey: Peoples’ Democratic Party \(HDP\)](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#). See also [Conflation with the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8.4 Demography

8.4.1 Harvard Divinity School, in an undated article entitled ‘Kurds in Turkey’, stated: ‘There are roughly 20-25 million Kurds across the Middle East, almost half of whom live in southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northern Syria and northwestern Iran, a region that some Kurds refer to as Kurdistan. Kurds make up around 18% of Turkey’s population; Turkey’s largest Kurdish population lives in Istanbul (2 million).’<sup>21</sup>

8.4.2 The MRGI’s June 2018 ‘Kurds’ report stated:

‘Kurds are the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in Turkey. The estimated numbers claimed by various sources range from 10 to 23 per cent of the population. According to the 1965 national census, those who declared Kurdish as their mother tongue or second language constituted around 7.5 per cent of the population. However, for various reasons, it is possible that this figure was under-inclusive at the time. Today, most estimates suggest that between 15 and 20 per cent of the Turkish population are Kurdish.’<sup>22</sup>

8.4.3 In October 2019, the UK Home Office (HO) published a report on their fact-finding mission (FFM) to Turkey in June 2019 which stated:

‘The representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Kurdish people prefer to live close together, but they are not told do so. They noted that there is a large Kurdish population in Istanbul, although Kurds live all over Turkey.

‘The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated, “Kurdish people will

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<sup>19</sup> CFR, [‘Conflict Between Turkey and Armed Kurdish Groups’](#), 12 June 2023

<sup>20</sup> CRS, [‘Turkey \(Türkiye\): Background and U.S. Relations’](#) (p14), 9 January 2023

<sup>21</sup> Harvard Divinity School, [‘Kurds in Turkey’](#), undated

<sup>22</sup> MRGI, [‘Kurds’](#), June 2018

tend to live in particular neighbourhoods in cities, and all the more so now, due to the presence of armed militia in big cities, known as the “night watchmen” or “night eagles”.

‘The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK added that “Approximately 4 million Kurds live in Istanbul, which is more than the number in Ankara.”

‘A representative from a confederation of trade unions stated that “[Kurds] are mainly residing in south eastern and eastern parts of Turkey. In those parts which are mainly populated by Kurds, economic and social issues are problematic; eastern and south eastern areas are less developed than western parts of Turkey, such as Istanbul and the Black Sea area of Turkey; life is harder.” He referred to government practices in the 1990s which led to “...a huge population movement to central Anatolia and to the west. Mersin and Adana are 2 cities which received the IDPs from the Kurdish populated areas.”

‘The HDP MP pointed to places in the the south east or Kurdish populated cities, where the security is very high – in particular pointing to a barrier at the entrance to the city in Şırnak district.’<sup>23</sup>

8.4.4 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) published a ‘Country Information Report: Turkey’ on 10 September 2020 which stated:

‘Turkey has a population of approximately 83 million, growing in 2019 at a rate of 1.39 per cent. Its ethnically diverse population reflects the absorption of many different groups during the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Since 1965, census surveys have not sought information about the ethnicity of Turkish citizens, and accurate numbers are difficult to obtain. However, international observers report between 70 and 75 per cent of the population is ethnically Turkish and around 19 per cent Kurdish. The remainder of the population consists of small communities with a range of ethnicities.

‘...Although official figures are not available, international observers estimate around 15 million Turkish citizens identify as Kurdish. The Kurdish population has traditionally been concentrated in southeastern Anatolia, where they form the majority ethnic group, and northeastern Anatolia, where they constitute a significant minority. Significant Kurdish populations also live in Istanbul and other major cities. In recent decades, approximately half of Turkey’s Kurdish population has migrated to western Turkey both to escape conflict...and in search of economic opportunities. Eastern and southeastern Turkey have historically been less developed than other parts of the country, with lower incomes, higher poverty rates, less industry, and less government investment. The Kurdish population is socio-economically diverse: while many are very poor, particularly in rural areas and the southeast, a Kurdish middle class is growing in urban centres, particularly in western Turkey.’<sup>24</sup>

8.4.5 CRS’ January 2023 report stated: ‘Kurds are largely concentrated in the less economically developed southeast, though populations are found in urban centers across the country.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> HO FFM report, ‘[Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#)’ (p24), October 2019

<sup>24</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)’ (para 2.8,3.2), 10 September 2020

<sup>25</sup> CRS, ‘[Turkey \(Türkiye\): Background and U.S. Relations](#)’ (p13), 9 January 2023

- 8.4.6 On 3 July 2023, BBC News reported, in an article entitled ‘Turkey Country Profile’, that Kurds make up about a fifth of Turkey’s 84.7 million people<sup>26</sup>.
- 8.4.7 The Virginia Journal of International Law (VJIL) published an undated article entitled ‘Alien Citizens: Kurds and Citizenship in the Turkish Constitution’, citing various sources, which stated: ‘The state’s reluctance to acknowledge the existence of Kurds is also evinced by the official census. There are no reliable figures for the number of Kurds in Turkey because the government refuses to count them. Doing so, the thinking goes, would require the official acknowledgement of their existence.’<sup>27</sup>
- 8.4.8 See also [Kurdish language in education and culture](#), [Employment](#), [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#), and the HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8.5 Nationality

- 8.5.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:
- ‘Article 10 of the Constitution states all individuals are equal without discrimination irrespective of language or race (among other things). In practice, this means there is a single nationality designation for all citizens, except for three non-Muslim minorities....Article 66 states everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a ‘Turk’. Article 42 states no language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Human rights observers have argued these citizenship and language provisions amount to discrimination against ethnic minorities.
- ‘...[N]ational identity (ID) cards...are compulsory for all citizens from birth and must be carried at all times. The cards are required for a wide range of everyday activities, including work, access to health and social services, registration to vote, access to courts, obtaining a passport or driver’s licence, registration for school or university, registration of property or vehicle ownership, and obtaining telephone, internet, and home utilities.’<sup>28</sup>
- 8.5.2 The USSD’s ‘U.S. Visa: Reciprocity and Civil Documents by Country’ undated information stated that from January 2017, new Turkish ID cards, called Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kimlik Kartı, or ‘Kimlik Kartı’ became available, while the old version, called Nüfus Cüzdanı, remain valid<sup>29</sup>.
- 8.5.3 The VJIL’s undated ‘Alien Citizens’ article stated: ‘Many Kurds interpret this provision [of Article 66] as an imposition of an ethnic identity - of being a Turk - that they vehemently reject.’<sup>30</sup>
- 8.5.4 The USSD’s 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: ‘The constitution provides a single nationality designation for all citizens and does not expressly recognize national, racial, or ethnic minorities except for three

<sup>26</sup> BBC News, ‘[Turkey Country Profile](#)’, 3 July 2023

<sup>27</sup> VJIL, ‘[Alien Citizens: Kurds and Citizenship in the Turkish Constitution](#)’, undated

<sup>28</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)’ (para 3.1,5.33), 10 September 2020

<sup>29</sup> USSD, ‘[U.S. Visa: Reciprocity and Civil Documents by Country](#)’ (Identity Card section), undated

<sup>30</sup> VJIL, ‘[Alien Citizens: Kurds and Citizenship in the Turkish Constitution](#)’, undated

non-Muslim minorities: Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Greek Orthodox Christians. Other national, religious, or ethnic minorities, including...Kurds...were not permitted to fully exercise their linguistic, religious, and cultural rights.<sup>31</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8.6 Religion

8.6.1 The VJIL's undated 'Alien Citizens' article stated: 'Most Kurds share the common religion of Islam with Turks...'<sup>32</sup>

8.6.2 Harvard Divinity School's undated article states: 'The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslim, with Alevi Shi'a Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi communities.'<sup>33</sup>

8.6.3 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:

'Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim, but of the Shafi'i school rather than the Hanafi school to which most ethnic Turks adhere. Turkish religious authorities consider both schools equally valid, and followers of the Shafi'i school are not subject to different discrimination on religious grounds.

'...Many Alevis are also Kurds, although estimated numbers again vary considerably (between half a million and several million). DFAT understands Kurdish Alevis are more likely to identify primarily as Alevi. While Alevis are widely distributed across Turkey, they are concentrated in central and inner-eastern Anatolia, Istanbul and other major cities..<sup>34</sup>

8.6.4 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report, published on 10 October 2022, stated: '...[F]reedom of worship continued to be generally respected.'<sup>35</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8.7 Likelihood of being identified as a Kurdish person

8.7.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: 'Human rights observers report some Kurds in western Turkey are reluctant to disclose their Kurdish identity, including through speaking Kurdish in public, for fear of provoking a violent response.'<sup>36</sup>

8.7.2 The HO's October 2019 FFM Report stated:

'More than one source stated that there is a tendency for people to think of Kurdish people as dark-skinned and with facial hair and one source stated that persons who meet this description are more likely to be stopped, checked and questioned by the police. However, other sources suggested it was difficult or very difficult to distinguish between a Turk and a Kurd, but was sometimes possible.

'A human rights lawyer stated that Kurdish names will be recognisable to the

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<sup>31</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p85), 20 March 2023

<sup>32</sup> VJIL, '[Alien Citizens: Kurds and Citizenship in the Turkish Constitution](#)', undated

<sup>33</sup> Harvard Divinity School, '[Kurds in Turkey](#)', undated

<sup>34</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.3,3.19), 10 September 2020

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p34), 12 October 2022

<sup>36</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.7), 10 September 2020



authorities, as will different accents. The Director of a Turkish organisation in Turkey believed that a Kurdish person could be recognisable by their name, accent or appearance.

'...When asked whether a Kurdish woman may be recognised by her appearance, Ms Gullu stated, "No. You cannot identify Kurdish and Turkish women apart in Istanbul." A human rights lawyer stated, "Women dress the same in Istanbul, whether Turkish or Kurdish, but Kurdish women are more noticeable in the east as they wear traditional clothes."<sup>37</sup>

- 8.7.3 See also [Kurdish language](#), [Women](#), [Societal discrimination](#) and [Conflation with the PKK](#) for further information on these subjects.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 8.8 Kurdish political views

- 8.8.1 The MRGI's June 2018 'Kurds' report stated:

'Inter-tribal politics can determine whether support will be given to the PKK or government forces. Loyalties are also determined by religious sentiment. Possibly up to 25 per cent of Kurds in the south-east are still primarily motivated by religious affiliation. Many still accept tarikat guidance (voluntary Islamic social welfare organisations that provide guidance and aid for Muslims. They have ancient mystic and traditional roots in Turkey) when it comes to voting. This has benefited religious parties and parties of the right.'<sup>38</sup>

- 8.8.2 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: 'There are a range of political views and divisions within the Kurdish community. Some support the PKK's ideology and methods while many are opposed. The AKP [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party] has at times attracted significant support from conservative Kurds (the party has Kurdish MPs, and at times Kurdish cabinet ministers), and the HDP – a left-wing social democratic platform infused with Kurdish nationalism – has significant support.

'...Many Kurds who are not politically active, as well as those who support the AKP, do not emphasise their Kurdish identity over their Turkish citizenship.'<sup>39</sup>

- 8.8.3 On 11 May 2023, Al Jazeera published an article entitled 'Don't take our votes for granted, warn Kurdish voters in Turkey' which stated:

'Many Kurds were drawn to the AK Party when it came to power in 2002, and Akbulut [Firat Akbulut, a 60-year-old Kurd living in Istanbul, who works as a dry cleaner in Esenyurt district] is one of a sizeable, albeit decreasing, segment of Turkey's population who still support the party.

'This support comes for different reasons: many Kurds are religiously conservative, and find that the AK Party's traditional values appeal to them; others see the CHP [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People's Party] and other groups within the opposition as representative of a Turkish elite

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<sup>37</sup> HO FFM report, '[Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#)' (p23-24,30), October 2019

<sup>38</sup> MRGI, '[Kurds](#)', June 2018

<sup>39</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.3,3.7), 10 September 2020

that has clamped down on Kurdish rights in the past, while Erdogan and the AK Party, particularly in their early years in power, expanded the space for Kurds to express their identity.

'While many Kurds are opposed to the PKK, a pledge to broker a deal with them during Erdogan's early years in power, and the calm that would bring to Turkey's southeast, also led to a popularity boost.

'Akbulut himself cannot see how the opposition would help Turkey's Kurdish population.'<sup>40</sup>

- 8.8.4 On 29 May 2023, Al Jazeera published an article entitled 'Five key takeaways from Turkey's pivotal election' which stated:

'Looking at the electoral map in Turkey, it is clear that support for Kilicdaroglu [President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rival] came in Istanbul, Ankara and Turkey's western Aegean coast, as well as the Kurdish-majority southeast.

'Voters in the southeast did not vote for the CHP in parliamentary elections (the pro-Kurdish Yesil Sol came out on top), a sign that the presidential vote came less out of support for the party and more out of opposition to Erdogan.

'...looking at the second-round election results, it is clear that there was a significant drop off in turnout, between 5 and 8 percent, in the southeast.

'That may potentially have been a response to the increasingly nationalist rhetoric adopted by Kilicdaroglu and the opposition in a bid to win the support of voters who supported ultranationalist Sinan Ogan in the first round.

'Kilicdaroglu embraced the endorsement of the far-right Umit Ozdag, which may further have alienated Kurdish voters.'<sup>41</sup>

- 8.8.5 See also [Employment](#) and [Kurds in public life](#). For further information about the PKK and HDP, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#), [Turkey: Peoples' Democratic Party \(HDP\)](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 10 August 2023

## 9. Daily life

### 9.1 Kurdish language

- 9.1.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: 'Most Kurdish people speak Kurmanji (commonly referred to as Kurdish), while a smaller number speak Zaza or Sorani...The Kurdish language is commonly used throughout Turkey.'<sup>42</sup>

- 9.1.2 On 12 May 2021, the Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF), 'a non-profit advocacy organization that promotes the rule of law, democracy and human

<sup>40</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Don't take our votes for granted, warn Kurdish voters in Turkey](#)', 11 May 2023

<sup>41</sup> Al Jazeera, '[Five key takeaways from Turkey's pivotal election](#)', 29 May 2023

<sup>42</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.3,3.4), 10 September 2020

rights with a special focus on Turkey'<sup>43</sup> published an article entitled 'Suppression of Kurdish language in Turkey is reflection of general intolerance towards Kurds: community leader' which stated:

'The pressure on Kurds in Turkey to not speak their own language is a reflection of a general intolerance towards the Kurdish population, said Birca Belek Language and Culture Association Co-chair Mirza Roni.

'Speaking to the Mezopotamya news agency (MA), Roni said five people had been killed in Turkey in the last seven years for speaking Kurdish. He added that authorities had remained silent about hate crimes against Kurds.

'...According to Roni the government's policies discouraging the use of Kurdish is embarrassing. Although Kurdish associations have worked hard to preserve their language and culture, their activities face the constant threat of being banned, he said.'<sup>44</sup>

- 9.1.3 On 9 November 2021, Al-Monitor, an independent source of Middle East news whose 'mission is to foster a deeper understanding between the Middle East and the international community by diving deep with analytical pieces',<sup>45</sup> published an article entitled 'Turkey's Kurds revive fight for language rights' which stated:

'Kurdish language rights have been a steadfast demand of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, where many Kurds, especially young people in urban areas, remain alienated from their heritage language.

'Kurdish parties and civic groups have revived efforts on the issue in recent months while encouraging Kurds to learn their heritage language, a cause that has united Kurds of various stripes, from conservatives to secular leftists.

'The Kurds have made notable gains amid Turkey's now-stalled bid to join the European Union and Ankara's peace talks with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)...Restrictions on the Kurdish language were largely relaxed, including the introduction of Kurdish as an elective course in schools.

'Kurdish-held local administrations made further strides, launching Kurdish-language cultural programs and kindergartens. The Kurdish names of villages and streets appeared on road signs. Many of the changes lacked a legal basis, but the Kurdish language enjoyed greater freedom in almost every realm as Ankara showed an unprecedented tolerance.

'Serefhan Ciziri, spokesperson for the Kurdish Language Platform, expressed apprehension that many Kurds are losing touch with their heritage language. "When you look at some cities with Kurdish populations, you see that [many people] have forgotten their language and do not speak Kurdish. There is a risk of extinction," Ciziri said. "We are not asking for anything extraordinary — we just want our language."<sup>46</sup>

- 9.1.4 On 11 April 2022, the SCF published an article entitled 'Students dancing to

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<sup>43</sup> SCF, '[About Us](#)', undated

<sup>44</sup> SCF, '[Suppression of Kurdish language in Turkey...](#)', 12 May 2021

<sup>45</sup> Al-Monitor, '[About Us](#)', undated

<sup>46</sup> Al-Monitor, '[Turkey's Kurds revive fight for language rights](#)', 9 November 2021



Kurdish folk songs beaten by far-right group in Turkey's Karaman province' which stated:

'Kurds in Turkey are often pressured not to speak their native language. Authorities frequently claim that people speaking in Kurdish are actually chanting slogans in support of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)...

'Prohibitions against the use of Kurdish in Turkey go back many years. Kurdish language, clothing, folklore and names had been banned in 1937. The words "Kurds," "Kurdistan" and "Kurdish" were among those officially prohibited. After a military coup in 1980, speaking Kurdish was officially forbidden even in private life.'<sup>47</sup>

- 9.1.5 On 25 April 2022, Gazete Duvar, a Turkish 'Independent news website...widely seen as a pro-opposition outlet, including coverage from a pro-Kurdish perspective',<sup>48</sup> published a report entitled 'Turkish top court finds no violation in banning letter 'w' from Kurdish names' which stated:

'Turkey's Constitutional Court (AYM) has found no violation of rights in authorities' move to not allow a Kurdish person to name their child "Ciwan" and not issue an identity card because the name has the letter "w" in it, Mezopotamya News Agency reported on April 25.

'The Constitutional Court concluded that the local court's implementation was in accordance with the requirements of the democratic social order, considering that the public authorities did not arbitrarily use their discretion and took measures within the framework of the use of the official language.

'Claiming that the applicant was not prevented from naming his child in his own culture, the Constitutional Court further said that the applicant was not discriminated on the basis that he is Kurdish. The court took the decision unanimously.

'As the letters X, Q, W, Î, Û, Ê which feature in the Kurdish alphabet are forbidden in Turkey, many Kurdish people in Turkey are given a second Turkish name in addition to Kurdish names.

'In 2013, as part of a series of reforms, the Turkish government announced that it would lift bans on the Kurdish alphabet and Kurdish names would be allowed officially. Yet nine years later, the Kurdish alphabet remains illegal, and Kurds still cannot give Kurdish names to their children.'<sup>49</sup>

- 9.1.6 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: 'More than 15 million citizens were estimated to be of Kurdish origin and spoke Kurdish dialects.

'...The law allows reinstatement of former non-Turkish names of villages and neighborhoods and provides political parties and their members the right to campaign and use promotional material in any language, but this right was not protected. The law restricts the use of languages other than Turkish in

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<sup>47</sup> SCF, '[Students dancing to Kurdish folk songs beaten by far-right group...](#)', 11 April 2022

<sup>48</sup> BBC Monitoring, (accessed via a subscription), '[Media guide: Turkey](#)' (section 5.2), 5 May 2023

<sup>49</sup> duvaR.english, '[...no violation in banning letter 'w' from Kurdish names](#)', 25 April 2022

government and public services.’<sup>50</sup>

- 9.1.7 See [Religion](#), [Likelihood of being identified as a Kurdish person](#), [Kurdish language in education and culture](#), [Women](#), [Societal discrimination](#), [Treatment in detention](#), and [Judicial system](#) for further information about the Kurdish languages in relation to these subjects. See also the HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9.2 Kurdish language in education and culture

- 9.2.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: ‘As with other non-Turkish languages, Kurdish cannot be used for mother-tongue education in public schools. Kurdish can be taught as an elective language in public schools and as a primary language of instruction – but not mother-tongue – in private schools, though this is limited in practice.’<sup>51</sup>

- 9.2.2 On 1 January 2022, the MRGI published an article entitled ‘Minorities in Turkey face numerous challenges in securing their rights to education in minority languages’ which stated: ‘In 2021, one of the most important topics on the agenda of minorities in Turkey was the right to education in a mother tongue.

‘The Kurdish Language Platform (Platforma Zimane Kurdi) wrote an open letter to President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, demanding that the government control on Kurdish language teaching and practice should be lifted and that Kurdish should be recognized officially.’<sup>52</sup>

- 9.2.3 The European Commission’s 2022 Turkey Report, published on 10 October 2022, stated:

‘On cultural rights, there were no development on the legislation to allow public services to be provided in languages other than Turkish. Legal restrictions on mother-tongue education in primary and secondary schools remained in place. Optional courses in Kurdish and Circassian are provided in public state schools but the requirement of a minimum of 10 students for these courses is an impediment. There are university programmes in Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, Zaza and Circassian. The limited or lack of appointment of teachers remains a limiting factor. The increased powers of the governors and arbitrary censorship continued to have a negative impact on arts and culture, which was already negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The past efforts of elected municipalities to promote the creation of language and culture institutions in these provinces remained closed. Kurdish cultural and language institutions, Kurdish media outlets and numerous art spaces remained mostly closed, as they have been since the 2016 coup attempt, which contributed to a further shrinking of cultural rights.’<sup>53</sup>

- 9.2.4 The USSD’s 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated:

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<sup>50</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p85,86), 20 March 2023

<sup>51</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Turkey’](#) (para 3.4), 10 September 2020

<sup>52</sup> MRGI, [‘Minorities in Turkey...rights to education in minority languages’](#), 1 January 2022

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, [‘Türkiye 2022 Report’](#) (p45), 12 October 2022

‘Centrally appointed governors and trustee mayors routinely canceled Kurdish-language cultural performances in the southeast, with last-minute bans in Adana, Mersin, Bitlis, Mus, Sirnak and other provinces justified by the alleged need to prevent the outbreak of “civil unrest” and stop the spread of “terrorist propaganda.” Approximately 20 events were canceled during the year

‘...In January police prevented a group of street musicians from singing in Kurdish on the streets of Istanbul. It was also reported that four of the musicians were detained and exposed to physical and verbal violence and had their instruments confiscated...The Diyarbakir Bar Association announced it would pursue legal action regarding the banning of Kurdish events, stating, “language is not only a communication tool, but is also an identity. Leave the prohibitive approach behind.”’<sup>54</sup>

9.2.5 The same source stated that:

‘The law allows citizens to open private institutions to provide education in languages and dialects they traditionally use in their daily lives, on the condition that schools are subject to the law and inspected by the Ministry of National Education. Some universities offered elective Kurdish-language courses, and five universities had Kurdish-language departments. A survey by the Ismail Besikci Foundation of 58 academics working in Kurdish studies found that 63 percent reported practicing self-censorship in their classes and 70 percent reported practicing self-censorship in their academic research and publications.’<sup>55</sup>

9.2.6 On 27 March 2023, a working paper by Tugba Bozcaga and Asli Cansunar of the United Nations University (UNU), citing various sources, was published by ReliefWeb, which stated: ‘...[M]any Kurdish children are subject to Turkish for the first time during their primary school education. The Turkish state has long believed that if citizens who speak Kurdish are taught Turkish, they will not be caught up in separatist propaganda and will eventually “remember” their Turkishness.’<sup>56</sup>

9.2.7 In May 2023, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) published a report entitled ‘United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2023 Annual Report; USCIRF–Recommended for Special Watchlist: Turkey’ which stated that: ‘...[S]chools reportedly pushed Kurdish students who wanted to enroll in Kurdish language courses to take religious classes instead.’<sup>57</sup>

9.2.8 See also [Women](#) for information about education for girls, and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) for further information.

[Back to Contents](#)

### 9.3 Attitude to education

9.3.1 The HO’s October 2019 FFM Report stated:

‘Both the HDP MP and the representative from a confederation of trade

<sup>54</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p51,86), 20 March 2023

<sup>55</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p85-86), 20 March 2023

<sup>56</sup> UNU, T Bozcaga & A Cansunar, [‘The education backlash...’](#) (p6), 27 March 2023

<sup>57</sup> USCIRF, [‘...USCIRF–Recommended for Special Watchlist: Turkey’](#) (p66), May 2023

unions...noted the issue of a language barrier for Kurdish people in official services, such as education, and the latter stated:

“Until now there have been serious issues in the Kurdish population in terms of education; good qualified teachers and schools in Kurdish regions were an issue, people didn’t receive the same level or quality of education as in the west. There is a general patriarchal issue and urbanisation issue as well, in comparison to other regions in the west. Due to these circumstances, it can be said that education is seen as less important in the south east than in other regions. (He later added the following notes: “[We] do not think that education is less important just because Kurdish people believe so. The reason, from [our] perspective, is that there are certain structural conditions that form their belief. Patriarchal issues affect parents’ attitude to education. Accordingly, they may not want to send their kids, particularly girls, to school. Similarly, urbanisation process is another factor that affects the parents’ behaviour/attitude to education. For example, they are forced to move to the city centre and have to change some habits. They have to adopt a new life in urban areas. Unlike rural areas, they (more family members) have to work more.”)<sup>58</sup>

- 9.3.2 See also [Women](#) for information about education for girls, and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) for further information.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9.4 Employment

- 9.4.1 The HO’s October 2019 FFM Report stated:

‘The HDP MP stated that having a Kurdish name can make it more difficult for a person to find employment. However, the representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that finding employment can be difficult at times, but this is the case for everyone, not only those of Kurdish origin.

‘The representative of a confederation of trade unions stated: “ILO [International Labour Organization] Convention 111 states you cannot discriminate in employment. A survey was given to employers; they were shown two pictures, one of a person from central Anatolia (western/central) which was not a smart-looking photo, and the second was of a Kurdish-looking person from eastern Turkey who looked a lot smarter. 80% chose their preferred photo based on where the person was born and not on other characteristics. This survey was done independently and conducted by academics last year.”

‘This representative further stated that of the confederation’s members who were dismissed from their jobs following the coup attempt of 2016, most were Kurdish, but they “[...] were not dismissed for being Kurdish only but because they are Kurdish public officers opposed to the government.” He added, “It is not just Kurdish people, it is also people in opposition to the government who are dismissed or prevented from getting a job. The process now for public sector employment is that you need to be interviewed and have a security investigation which makes it impossible for someone of Kurdish ethnicity to get the job.

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<sup>58</sup> HO FFM report, [‘Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK’](#) (p26), October 2019

“For example, you sit an exam for public service job, you get the highest score but because of your Kurdish identity you do not get the job, but someone with half your score who is pro-government and not Kurdish will get the job. It is the security investigation that stops you from getting the job, for example because you are Kurdish and may be a security risk.”

‘Murat Celikkan, Director of Hafiza Merkezi, stated:

“Kurdish people face some discrimination; for example, the Bosphorus University is an English/American language school, it is one of the best universities in Turkey. Some of the students are Kurdish, when they go to apply for jobs employers are impressed at the person’s ability to speak English, however, when they speak Turkish and they do not have the Turkish dialect, they are then discriminated against because they have a Kurdish dialect and they do not get the job. This is discrimination not only by the state but in daily life. [...]

“The government discriminates against Kurds in respect to holding different government jobs, being MPs or prosecutors. You can be a lawyer, even a minister or a high-level social worker if you do not emphasise your Kurdish identity or openly say that you are a Kurd.”

‘Estella Schmid, a co-founder of Peace in Kurdistan, stated:

“If you are a middle-class Kurd, you will most likely have an “ok” job and an education which you can use to conceal your Kurdish ethnicity to some degree. However, having an “ok” job such as being a journalist or an academic, you will be a lot more politically aligned with the Turkish government and not aligned with Kurdish politics. In private a middle-class Kurdish person who lives in Istanbul or Ankara may give indirect support to the Kurdish cause, but not openly as this may hinder them in the future.”

‘The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated:

“There can be discrimination in regard to accessing employment; as explained above, Kurds work mainly in construction and other heavy work. They also work on farms, as fruit pickers and in tourist resorts. It would be hard for a Kurd to become a Judge or prosecutor, for example. Some Kurds are teachers, but in more basic jobs. Some Kurds run businesses, but they must show that they are very loyal to the government. The private sector in Turkey is small, and it generally excludes Kurds. If a Kurd is considered well-off or successful, they are more likely to be targeted by the state, and most Kurds who reach higher positions will say that they are Turkish and loyal to the government.”

‘A representative from a confederation of trade unions said:

“There is such oppression in private sector for Kurdish people, they cannot identify as a Kurdish person, and they cannot speak Kurdish. No law bans this or the use of Kurdish languages, but this is the practice. For example, A Kurdish seasonal agricultural worker was attacked and lynched for trying to sing a song in Kurdish language. The attack took place in an area where nationalist feeling is strong. It was done by the local people, this is societal discrimination, it was triggered by government policies. This happened last year (2018).”



'The same representative stated, "We can say Kurdish people are not well educated, that is why they hold the worst jobs in the civil service and private sector, there is no equality in this regard, they receive very little economic welfare in the country. There are now about four million Syrian refugees that are worse off, before this the Kurds were the worst off in terms of jobs."<sup>59</sup>

- 9.4.2 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:

'While Kurds participate in all aspects of Turkish public life, including government, the civil service and military, they have traditionally been under-represented in senior positions. Some Kurds employed in the public sector have reported a reluctance to reveal their Kurdish identity for fear of negatively affecting their prospects for promotion.'

'...Notwithstanding a strict constitutional commitment to secularism, Turkish laws and long-standing practices work to the benefit of the majority population, including in relation to public sector employment opportunities.'<sup>60</sup>

- 9.4.3 On 23 February 2022, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 'a German non-profit think tank',<sup>61</sup> published an article entitled 'BTI 2022 Country Report' which stated:

'Members of religious and ethnic minorities continue to be practically excluded from certain professional positions, such as civil servant and military officer.

'...Ethnicity, gender and place of residence strongly influence access to education and well-paying jobs. Regional disparities in poverty rates remain high, and extreme income disparities between rural and urban regions continue, particularly in the east and southeast regions of the country, where the average household income is only one-third of certain western provinces.'<sup>62</sup>

- 9.4.4 On 9 March 2023, Freedom House published a report entitled 'Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey', reporting on events of 2022, which stated: 'More than 125,000 public sector workers who were fired or suspended following the coup attempt in 2016 have since been unable to find employment due to an atmosphere of guilt by association...'<sup>63</sup>

- 9.4.5 On 11 May 2023, the BORGEM Magazine, an initiative of the 'Borgen Project, an influential humanitarian organization working to make global poverty a focus of U.S. foreign policy',<sup>64</sup> published an article which stated: '...[D]ue to human rights issues surrounding the Kurds in Turkey, there are regulations around the sales of goods produced by Kurdish farmers. This means there are limited ways...to earn money.'<sup>65</sup>

- 9.4.6 See [Kurds in public life](#), [Kurdish language in education and culture](#), [Attitude to education](#) and [Kurdish political views](#) for further information on these.

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<sup>59</sup> HO FFM report, 'Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK' (p27-29), October 2019

<sup>60</sup> DFAT, 'Country Information Report: Turkey' (para 3.8,3.18), 10 September 2020

<sup>61</sup> ecoi.net, 'Source description: Bertelsmann Stiftung', 19 May 2020

<sup>62</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, 'BTI 2022 Country Report' (p7,18), 23 February 2022

<sup>63</sup> Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey' (section G1), 9 March 2023

<sup>64</sup> BORGEM Magazine, [Homepage](#), undated

<sup>65</sup> BORGEM Magazine, 'Child Labor in Turkey', 11 May 2023

## 9.5 Accommodation

- 9.5.1 On 7 February 2023, Sky News reported, in the wake of the earthquake that: 'In previous earthquakes, Kurds have suffered disproportionately from shoddy, poorly built housing and have blamed the Turkish government and corruption for it. That has led to rioting and fuelled friction with authorities.'<sup>66</sup>
- 9.5.2 Freedom House's 9 March 2023 publication stated:  
'Freedom of movement is limited in some regions and for groups treated with suspicion by the government. In southeastern Turkey, movement is limited due to the conflict between the government and the PKK.  
'...Private property rights are legally enshrined, but for the last decade, critics or opponents of the government have been subjected to intrusive tax and regulatory inspections.'<sup>67</sup>
- 9.5.3 On 7 June 2023, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT), an internationally-recognised NGO based in Ankara whose main objective is 'to reach a world where torture and other ill-treatment practices are put an end to'<sup>68</sup> reported that:  
'...[M]edia reports claimed that the contract of 2 Kurdish students of Akdeniz University in Antalya regarding the house they rented was canceled by the real estate office after the police called the real estate office and threatened it. One student said in a statement published in the press: "After we rented the house, we paid the fee and signed the contract. On the way home the real estate agent called me and told me that a policeman...had called him. The real estate agent said the police threatened him, saying, "These are terrorists, don't give them houses." Then the real estate agent called us and said that he had given up on giving us the house...We have been facing these problems for 2 years. They even prevent us from sheltering. Even at school, we are constantly monitored, they go to every student we come in contact with and say we are "terrorists" and pressure them not to talk to us'<sup>69</sup>
- 9.5.4 N.B. the information quoted above, and all other COI quoted from this source throughout the rest of this CPIN was originally published in Turkish. All COI from this source has been translated using a free online translation tool. As such 100% accuracy cannot be guaranteed.
- 9.5.5 See [Demography](#), [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#), and [Curfews](#) for further information on living conditions for Kurdish people. See also the HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) for further information.

## 9.6 Medical care

- 9.6.1 During the HO's October 2019 FFM, the representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Kurds may not always be able to access medical treatment from a doctor speaking a Kurdish language as all medical

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<sup>66</sup> Sky News, '[Turkey-Syria earthquake...getting aid...where it's needed a challenge](#)', 7 February 2023

<sup>67</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey](#)' (section G1-G2), 9 March 2023

<sup>68</sup> HRFT, '[About HRF](#)', undated

<sup>69</sup> HRFT, '[7 June 2023 Daily Human Rights Report](#)', 7 June 2023

personnel are rotated around the country, so not everyone posted to the south-east will be able to speak a Kurdish language. The HDP MP affirmed that Kurdish people cannot always access official services, such as healthcare, in their mother tongue.<sup>70</sup>

- 9.6.2 On 23 July 2020, the Borgen Project, published a blog entitled ‘Healthcare in Turkey’ which stated: ‘Turkey has created a system to include access to high-quality healthcare for all. In 2012, 98% of Turkish residents had access to healthcare because of The Health Transformation Program led by the government of Turkey and the World Bank.

‘The advancing system of Turkey aims for 100% access to quality healthcare.’<sup>71</sup>

- 9.6.3 See [Kurdish language](#) for more information on this subject.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9.7 Women

- 9.7.1 The HO’s October 2019 FFM Report stated:

‘When asked whether any societal discrimination against Kurds might have a particular impact on Kurdish women and girls, the Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated, “Women are generally treated less favourably than men throughout Turkish society.”

‘Canan Gullu, President of the Federation of Womens’ Associations of Turkey stated:

“Kurdish women are the same as Turkish women in terms of reporting domestic abuse to the police. Kurdish people live all over Turkey and face the same issues as Turkish women when reporting violence. Living in a patriarchal system makes it harder to resist violence.

“There have been changes in attitude after a domestic abuse hotline was announced on television and women started to call the hotline. Over the last two years there has been an increase in the number of complaints registered. Due to the patriarchal structure of the Kurdish society, male relatives, such as uncles and fathers, also call the helpline, saying daughters or female relatives are in a violent house.”

‘When asked whether less educated women and girls may call the helpline, Ms Gullu answered, “The Federation of Womens’ Associations put advertisements on television, and they can be seen by everyone, old and young. Even old women call the helpline, it is available in Kurdish and Arabic and in the future we may make it available in English. In the police stations and courts, if there is a Kurdish girl who does not speak Turkish, they can have access to a translator.”

‘On the subject of education, Ms Gullu stated, “There is no distinction between Kurdish or Turkish women. However, because of the Kurdish traditional lifestyle structure, most of the time Kurdish women are deprived of education which in turn makes them more prone to violence...Kurdish

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<sup>70</sup> HO FFM report, [‘Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK’](#) (p30-31), October 2019

<sup>71</sup> Borgen Project, [‘Healthcare in Turkey’](#), 23 July 2020



women are less educated, but this is not just a Kurdish problem; it is a problem for all girls, including those in the Black Sea and Central regions and those in underage marriages.

“There has been a change of legislation in the education system to break it down into a 4+4+4 years system. A child starts school at 6 and education until 10 is mandatory. However before the next stage (10-14), some will be married. Some women are happy about this, they enjoy it. However, this is not strictly a Kurdish issue but an issue across Turkey.”

‘When asked about arranged marriage, Ms Gullu replied, “Underage marriage is an issue in the whole of Turkey, not just in the Kurdish regions. When mayors were dismissed in Kurdish areas and “legal” guardians were put in place, shelters which had previously provided support to women in Kurdish areas were closed...

“In Kurdish areas, arranged marriage is common but it is happening less and less as women are becoming better educated.”

‘When asked whether a Kurdish woman or girls might marry without parental approval, the Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated, “It is less common now for family approval to be sought, but more so in the more religious sector of Kurdish society.”

‘When asked whether a Kurdish woman may be recognised by her appearance, Ms Gullu stated, “No. You cannot identify Kurdish and Turkish women apart in Istanbul.” A human rights lawyer stated, “Women dress the same in Istanbul, whether Turkish or Kurdish, but Kurdish women are more noticeable in the east as they wear traditional clothes.”<sup>72</sup>

9.7.2 On 10 March 2021, the SCF published an article entitled ‘Kurdish not among 6 languages supported by app to be used against domestic violence’ which stated: ‘Kurdish will not be among the six languages and that will be supported by KADES, a smartphone app designed by the Turkish National Police for use by women to ask for help in cases of domestic violence, according to ads shared on social media.’<sup>73</sup>

9.7.3 See also [Likelihood of being recognised as a Kurdish person](#) and [Attitude to education](#) for further information on women.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 9.8 Societal discrimination

9.8.1 The GoT’s 3 August 2022 submission to the UNHRC, published on 28 April 2023, stated: ‘In Article 216, provoking the public to hatred, hostility or degrading against another section of the public based on discriminatory motives are criminalized.’<sup>74</sup>

9.8.2 The SCF’s 11 April 2022 article stated:

‘A group of university students in Turkey’s southern Karaman province were attacked by the far-right ultranationalist Grey Wolves for dancing to Kurdish

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<sup>72</sup> HO FFM report, ‘[Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#)’ (p29-30), October 2019

<sup>73</sup> SCF, ‘[Kurdish not among 6 languages...to be used against domestic violence](#)’, 10 March 2021

<sup>74</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, ‘[...periodic report submitted by Türkiye...](#)’ (para 44), 3 August 2022

music, the Evrensel daily reported.

'The students were dancing in the university dorm when the Grey Wolves group allegedly forced them inside a small room and beat them. The also confiscated the students' telephones and wrote, "We apologize to the Turkish public for our immoral behavior," on their social media accounts.

'...The Karaman Governor's Office issued a statement saying no such incident had occurred on the university premises. However, they did acknowledge that a group of 15 people had gathered in front of the dormitory but had been dispersed by the police.'<sup>75</sup>

- 9.8.3 On 29 July 2022, the HRFT reported that: 'On July 28, 2022, it was learned from the news in the press that a Kurdish seasonal agricultural worker named Esat Atabay in Kocaali district of Sakarya was subjected to a racist attack on July 25, 2022 and was seriously injured in the head.'<sup>76</sup>
- 9.8.4 In their 30-31 August 2022 daily report, the HRFT stated that: 'It was learned that Kurdish workers working in the hazelnut collection business in the Hendek district of Sakarya were attacked by a group including the owner of the garden where they worked...1 child and 2 people were injured as a result of the attack. Workers reportedly left the district after the attack.'<sup>77</sup>
- 9.8.5 In their 10-12 September 2022 daily report, the HRFT stated: 'On September 11, 2022, it was learned that 1 person... was killed and 1 person...was injured in a racist attack against Kurdish workers working in a building in Cide district of Kastamonu. It is learnt that 1 person detained in connection with the attack was arrested by the court on 12 September 2022.'<sup>78</sup>
- 9.8.6 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated that: 'Fifteen bar associations in south-eastern and eastern provinces condemned the escalating violence against Kurds across Türkiye in July 2021 and asked for an end to the language of violence and discrimination.'<sup>79</sup>
- 9.8.7 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: 'There were several attacks against ethnic Kurds that human rights organizations alleged were racially motivated. On February 22 [2022], a group of approximately 30 individuals attacked three Kurdish students on the campus of Akdeniz University in Antalya who were sitting in a café. The group had been on campus taunting Kurdish students. Students reported police remained unresponsive while the attack was taking place and no charges were launched against the perpetrators.'<sup>80</sup>
- 9.8.8 In their 1-3 April 2023 daily report, the HRFT stated that: 'On April 3, 2023, it was learned that 3 construction workers in the Bodrum district of Muğla were subjected to a racist attack on the grounds that they spoke Kurdish among themselves. As a result of the racist attack, it was learned that 3 people were

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<sup>75</sup> SCF, '[Students dancing to Kurdish folk songs beaten by far-right group...](#)', 11 April 2022

<sup>76</sup> HRFT, '[29 July 2022 Daily Human Rights Report](#)', 29 July 2022

<sup>77</sup> HRFT, '[30 -31 August 2022 Daily Human Rights Report](#)', 31 August 2022

<sup>78</sup> HRFT, '[10 – 12 September 2022 Daily Human Rights Report](#)', 12 September 2022

<sup>79</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p18), 12 October 2022

<sup>80</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p86), 20 March 2023

injured in various parts of their bodies.’<sup>81</sup>

- 9.8.9 On 24 June 2023, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), an organisational alliance that aims ‘to strengthen the legal environment for civil society, philanthropy, and public participation around the world’,<sup>82</sup> published a report entitled ‘Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey’ which stated: ‘On May 3, 2023, a man in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul fatally stabbed Cihan Aymaz, a Kurdish street musician, claiming that Aymaz refused to play a nationalist song as requested. According to Aymaz’s family members, the musician had previously faced legal issues for performing political songs, which led them to suspect that the assailant’s actions were driven by racism.’<sup>83</sup>
- 9.8.10 See [Likelihood of being identified as a Kurdish person](#), [Kurdish language in education and culture](#), [Employment](#) and [Accommodation](#) for further information on these subjects. See also a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) for further information about this subject.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 10 August 2023

## 10. State treatment of Kurds

### 10.1 Kurds in public life

- 10.1.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:

‘In September 2016, the government adopted a decree that permitted it to appoint “trustees” in lieu of elected mayors, deputy mayors, or members of municipal councils suspended on charges of terrorism. This decree was used liberally in southeastern Turkey before and after the 2019 municipal elections. Of the 65 Kurdish HDP-controlled municipalities following elections in March 2019, 47 had been replaced by government-appointed trustees as at July 2020, with a number of elected officials detained in prison. The 2019 municipal elections saw main opposition CHP win a number of significant municipalities, including Ankara and Istanbul, after long periods of AKP control.

‘...No laws prevent Kurds (or other ethnic minorities) from obtaining public or private sector employment, from participating in public life, or from accessing government health and education services in the same fashion as other Turkish citizens. The ability of Kurdish citizens to do so in practice, however, depends considerably on individual circumstance and geographic location: those in western Turkey will have far better access to government services than those residing in conflict-affected areas of the southeast.’<sup>84</sup>

- 10.1.2 On 24 February 2022, Freedom House published a report entitled ‘Freedom in the World 2022 – Turkey’ which stated:

‘Turkey maintains a multiparty system, with five major parties in the parliament. However, the rise of new parties is inhibited by the 10 percent

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<sup>81</sup> HRFT, ‘[1 – 3 April 2023 Daily Human Rights Report](#)’, 3 April 2023

<sup>82</sup> ICNL, ‘[Our Organization](#)’, undated

<sup>83</sup> ICNL, ‘[Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey](#)’ (“Legal Analysis”), 24 June 2023

<sup>84</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)’ (para 2.42-2.43,3.8), 10 September 2020

vote threshold for parliamentary representation—an unusually high bar by global standards. Parties can bypass this threshold by forming electoral alliances. Parties can be disbanded for endorsing policies that are not in agreement with constitutional parameters, and Turkey’s Constitutional Court has a history of banning Kurdish...political parties for violating the constitution.’<sup>85</sup>

10.1.3 The GoT’s 3 August 2022 submission to the UNHRC, published on 28 April 2023, stated: ‘Article 12/1 of Law on Political Parties states: “Political party statutes cannot contain provisions which make distinction on the basis of language, race, sex, religion, sect, family, group, class or profession among the applicants for membership”.’<sup>86</sup>

10.1.4 The European Commission’s 2022 Turkey Report, published on 10 October 2022, stated: ‘The State of Emergency Inquiry Commission has yet to complete the examination of its caseload in relation to the public employees who were dismissed by decree-laws during the period of emergency rule.’<sup>87</sup>

CRS’ January 2023 report stated: ‘Under the state of emergency enacted after the failed July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey’s government cracked down on Turkey’s Kurdish minority. Dozens of elected Kurdish mayors were removed from office and replaced with government-appointed “custodians.” In November 2016, the two then-co-leaders of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or HDP) were arrested along with other parliamentarians under various charges of crimes against the state; some remain imprisoned, along with other party leaders and members who have been detained on similar charges since 2016. Turkish officials routinely accuse Kurdish politicians of support for the PKK, but these politicians generally deny close ties.’<sup>88</sup>

10.1.5 On 27 January 2023, Inter Press Service (IPS), ‘a global non-profit, non-governmental news agency, emphasising on issues of development, globalisation, human rights and the environment’<sup>89</sup>, published an article entitled ‘Erdogan’s Desperate Bid to Become the New Atatürk’ which stated: ‘To improve his chances of being re-elected, Erdogan wants to ensure that the Kurdish political parties are denied representation in the Parliament. He has incarcerated many of the 56 members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and removed its remaining members from the legislative process; he is determined to close the party altogether.’<sup>90</sup>

10.1.6 Freedom House’s 9 March 2023 publication stated: ‘While the Kurds, Turkey’s largest ethnic minority, are represented in politics, pro-Kurdish parties face regular harassment by the government via hate speech, politically motivated prosecutions, and disinformation in progovernment media.’<sup>91</sup>

10.1.7 On 13 June 2023, the Turkish Minute, ‘a website presenting news on Turkey

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<sup>85</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022 – Turkey](#)’ (section B1), 24 February 2022

<sup>86</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, ‘[...periodic report submitted by Türkiye...](#)’ (para 43), 3 August 2022

<sup>87</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p4), 12 October 2022

<sup>88</sup> CRS, ‘[Turkey \(Türkiye\): Background and U.S. Relations](#)’ (p14-15), 9 January 2023

<sup>89</sup> ecoi.net, ‘[Source Description: Inter Press Service \(IPS\)](#)’, 20 January 2020

<sup>90</sup> IPS, ‘[Erdogan’s Desperate Bid to Become the New Atatürk](#)’, 27 January 2023

<sup>91</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey](#)’ (section B4), 2023

in English...run by the International Journalists Association e.V., a journalism organization established in Germany by media professionals who had to flee Turkey due to government pressure and are now living in exile',<sup>92</sup> published an article entitled 'Turkey arrests 3 more Kurdish politicians' which stated: 'An executive from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and two co-mayors in an eastern province were jailed on Tuesday, in the latest episode of an ongoing crackdown on Kurdish politicians in Turkey, local media outlets reported.'<sup>93</sup>

- 10.1.8 See [Kurdish political views](#) and [Employment](#) for further information on these subjects. For further information about the PKK and HDP, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#), [Turkey: Peoples' Democratic Party \(HDP\)](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.2 Conflation with the PKK

- 10.2.1 On 21 October 2019, Foreign Policy, a Washington D.C.-based 'award-winning magazine of global politics, economics, and ideas',<sup>94</sup> published an article entitled 'Turkey's Crackdown on Kurdish Mayors Could Backfire' which stated: 'In Turkey, support for the PKK, which Ankara and Washington consider a terrorist group, has long been grounds for dismissal or imprisonment. But what exactly constitutes support is subject to the state's discretion, and the line is by no means fixed. Instead, it ebbs and flows, determined by developments in the ongoing conflict between the government and Kurdish separatists - or by the election cycle.'<sup>95</sup>

- 10.2.2 The HO's October 2019 FFM Report stated:

'The HDP MP also perceived that the government consider HDP supporters as terrorists, and consider Kurds as HDP supporters.

'...A human rights lawyer stated, "Some traditional clothes are worn by men along the Turkey/Iraq border, but you cannot wear traditional clothes away from the border because they look very similar to the PKK uniform [and this has been used by the authorities as evidence to arrest people]."

'...A representative of the Turkish Ministry of Justice stated that anyone who commits crime in the name of the PKK or any other terrorist organisation will be prosecuted and convicted if there is evidence, whether they are Turkish, Kurdish or Syrian. Prosecutors will focus on activities, not ethnicity.

'...When asked what would bring a suspected PKK member/supporter to the attention of the authorities, the Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK opined:

"...Kurds are assumed to be PKK members/supporters."

'...Sebnem Financi of the HRFT stated, "Shepherds and ordinary Kurdish people from Kurdish villages are in jail for allegedly supporting the PKK or

<sup>92</sup> Turkish Minute, '[Who Are We?](#)', undated

<sup>93</sup> Turkish Minute, '[Turkey arrests 3 more Kurdish politicians](#)', 13 June 2023

<sup>94</sup> Foreign Policy, '[About Us](#)', 3 January 2009

<sup>95</sup> Foreign Policy, '[Turkey's Crackdown on Kurdish Mayors Could Backfire](#)', 21 October 2019



have given shelter and food to PKK. They arrest a few prominent people from a village as an intimidation tactic.”

‘One source noted that, following the killing of 34 Kurdish people from a village called Roboski by the Turkish military, who had mistaken them for PKK operatives, one of the relatives pursuing justice for those killed had been arrested; the source believed that this family member had been targeted by the authorities in order to send a warning to the rest of the family. He stated that individuals are targeted by the authorities, especially if they are well-known, in order to intimidate others.’<sup>96</sup>

10.2.3 The same source also noted that a human rights lawyer stated: ‘There is not an advanced process of stopping/searching; if you have darker skin (from the east of Turkey), they will check Twitter, Instagram, Facebook.’<sup>97</sup> (69)

10.2.4 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: ‘Some non-Kurdish Turkish citizens continue to associate all Kurds with the PKK.’<sup>98</sup>

10.2.5 On 18 June 2021, Amnesty International (AI) published a report which claimed: ‘The constellation of counterterrorism laws currently in force in Turkey includes unacceptably broad definitions of “terrorism” and “terrorist offender.”...[T]here is no requirement that a person must have committed a serious crime against the state that has caused specific, clearly enumerated harms, for an individual to be deemed a “terrorist offender” under Article 2 of the Anti-Terrorism Law (Law No. 3713.)’<sup>99</sup>

10.2.6 IPS’ 27 January 2023 article stated:

‘Erdogan continues his crackdown on his own Kurdish community which represents nearly 20 percent of the population, depriving them of basic human rights. His systematic persecution of the Kurds seems to have no bounds, as he accuses thousands of being supporters of the PKK, which he considers as a terrorist organization and which successive Turkish governments have been fighting for more than 50 years at staggering human and material cost.

‘...He is preventing Finland and Sweden from joining NATO unless Sweden extradites about 130 political refugees, mostly Turkish Kurds, to stand trial in Turkey.’<sup>100</sup>

10.2.7 The USSD’s 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: ‘In some cases, prosecutors considered the possession of some Kurdish-language, pro-Kurdish, or Gulen movement books to be credible evidence of membership in a terror organization.’<sup>101</sup> The same source added: ‘Security force efforts against the PKK disproportionately affected Kurdish communities throughout much of the year.’<sup>102</sup>

10.2.8 See [Background and recent history](#), the Country Policy and Information

<sup>96</sup> HO FFM report, [‘Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK’](#) (p17,21,22-23), October 2019

<sup>97</sup> HO FFM report, [‘Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK’](#) (p69), October 2019

<sup>98</sup> DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Turkey’](#) (para 3.3), 10 September 2020

<sup>99</sup> AI, [‘Turkey: Weaponizing Counterterrorism’](#) (p10), 18 June 2021

<sup>100</sup> IPS, [‘Erdogan’s Desperate Bid to Become the New Atatürk’](#), 27 January 2023

<sup>101</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p39), 20 March 2023

<sup>102</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p85), 20 March 2023

Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Worker's Party \(PKK\)](#), [Turkey: Gülenist movement](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) for more information about this subject.

[Back to Contents](#)

### 10.3 Approach of the government and others in authority

#### 10.3.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:

'The secular 'Kemalist' ideology that underpinned the founding of the Turkish Republic envisioned Turkey as a nation with a single shared ethnic identity. A range of policies sought to assimilate ethnic minorities into a majority Turkish nation by suppressing public expressions of minority identity (see Recent History). As the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, these policies particularly affected the Kurdish population. Policies included bans on public use of the Kurdish language, bans on Kurdish place names, and a prohibition on public support for Kurdish political parties, particularly those perceived to be separatist in nature. The policies were deeply resented, particularly in the southeastern areas where Kurds were in the majority, and fuelled a long-running conflict in the southeast between the government and PKK. The AKP government gradually wound back restrictions on the expression of minority identity and most are now officially revoked, particularly since the 2013 ceasefire between the government and the PKK...Amended laws have reinstated original Kurdish place names to villages and neighbourhoods; however, in some instances where government appointed trustees have replaced democratically elected Kurdish HDP mayors, these have again been removed.'<sup>103</sup>

#### 10.3.2 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated:

'A parliamentary bylaw prohibits use of the word "Kurdistan" or other sensitive terms on the floor of parliament, stating that parliamentarians could be reprimanded or temporarily expelled from the assembly. Authorities did not uniformly implement this bylaw.

'In September [2022] the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into a councilor from the CHP over charges of "conducting terror propaganda." The investigation concerns councilor Nevaf Bilek's remarks made to Kurdish news agency Rudaw at the CHP's Extraordinary Provincial Congress held in Diyarbakır's central Yenisehir district. In the interview, held in Kurdish, Bilek said, "Diyarbakır is really an important and historical city in Turkish Kurdistan. It is a big city."<sup>104</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

### 10.4 Freedom of assembly

#### 10.4.1 In April 2022, the HRFT published a report entitled 'Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers Report 2021' which stated: 'Permanent prohibitions and hindrances on all acts covering meetings and demonstrations including those held for demands for democratic rights and freedom of expression in

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<sup>103</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.4), 10 September 2020

<sup>104</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p35), 20 March 2023

the provinces where Kurdish population is high have continued in 2021.<sup>105</sup>

10.4.2 The GoT's 3 August 2022 submission to the UNHRC, published on 28 April 2023, stated:

'Freedom of peaceful assembly is a democratic right safeguarded by the Constitution (Article 34) and the relevant national legislation. Everyone has the right to hold unarmed and peaceful meetings and demonstrations without prior permission. Peaceful assemblies and demonstrations were held without any interference in the event of their conformity with the law.

'...In cases problems occur, it is, in the first place, resolved through negotiation and effective communication with demonstrators. Security forces intervene, as a last resort, within the legal boundaries.

'Similar to all modern police organizations, tear gases, launchers, stun guns and their ammunition are used within the scope of the principle of proportionality and only as a last resort, in all kinds of protests and activities which are illegal or become illegal. Police officers receive "Training on How to Use Tear Gases, Gas Launchers and Stun Guns and Equipment and Ammunition Related to Them".

'In the last 5 years, more than 99% of the mass protests/activities in Türkiye were held in a peaceful environment without any intervention.'<sup>106</sup>

10.4.3 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated:

'There was further backsliding in the area of freedom of assembly and association where legislation and its implementation are not in line with the Turkish Constitution, European standards or the international conventions that Türkiye is party to. There was an increase in the use of bans, the disproportionate use of force and the number of interventions in peaceful demonstrations, investigations, court cases and administrative fines against demonstrators on charges of terrorism-related activities or on violating the law on demonstrations and marches. There is need for urgent application of ECtHR case-law and revision of relevant national laws.

'...Protests or demonstrations on human rights, environmental rights, and political and socioeconomic rights were banned in several provinces on most occasions, including demonstrations by dismissed civil servants. Many large gatherings were banned...The law on meetings and demonstrations allows the administration to prohibit meetings and demonstrations on the basis of vague, discretionary and arbitrary criteria.'<sup>107</sup>

10.4.4 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: 'Kurdish and pro-Kurdish civil society organizations and political parties continued to experience problems exercising freedoms of assembly and association.'<sup>108</sup>

10.4.5 On 5 July 2023, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), 'a Roma-led international public interest law organisation working to combat anti-Romani

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<sup>105</sup> HRFT, '[Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers Report 2021](#)' (p44-45), April 2022

<sup>106</sup> GoT published by UNHRC, '[...periodic report...by Türkiye...](#)' (para 255,258-260), 3 August 2022

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p39), 12 October 2022

<sup>108</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p85), 20 March 2023



racism and human rights abuse of Roma',<sup>109</sup> published an article which stated: 'Police target and routinely attack public demonstrations by the...Kurds with excessive violence.'<sup>110</sup>

- 10.4.6 See [Newroz celebrations](#) for further information. See also the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#) and a HOFFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.5 Newroz celebrations

- 10.5.1 The Kurdish Project, 'a cultural-education initiative to raise awareness in Western culture of Kurdish people',<sup>111</sup> published an undated article entitled 'Kurdish Newroz' which stated:

'Newroz is the Kurdish celebration of the Persian new year holiday "Nowruz." Kurdish Newroz coincides with the Spring Equinox, and is a festival celebrating the beginning of spring. Over the years, Newroz has come to represent new beginnings, as well as an opportunity to support the Kurdish cause. For these reasons, Newroz is considered to be the most important festival in Kurdish culture. Typically the festival is celebrated in the days running up to the Spring Equinox...'<sup>112</sup>

- 10.5.2 On 21 March 2022, Gazete Duvar published an article entitled 'Thousands celebrate Newroz in Istanbul, several cities across Turkey' which stated:

'Thousands gathered at Istanbul's Yenikapı Square to celebrate the arrival of spring, with the attendance of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) co-chair Mithat Sancar, non-governmental organizations, and many other representatives of political parties.

'Some 83 people were detained after the event in Istanbul, according to the Istanbul Governor's Office.

'The Lawyers for Freedom Association (ÖHD) said the detainees were battered and mistreated by police, adding that the reason behind the detention was that they allegedly stayed in the area for longer than the scheduled time allowed for the event.

'It added that they would later be released from detention.

'Newroz was celebrated in many other provinces, including the Kurdish majority eastern provinces of Van, Hakkari, Bitlis and Elazığ, the southern provinces of Gaziantep and Hatay, and the northwestern province of Bursa.

'The celebration in Istanbul was led by the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) with the slogan "Dem dema serkeftinêye" (Now it is time to win).'<sup>113</sup>

- 10.5.3 On 25 March 2022, Bianet, an independent news website funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) with 'a reputation for coverage of women's, minority, LGBT and media issues',<sup>114</sup> published an

<sup>109</sup> ERRC, '[Who We Are](#)', undated

<sup>110</sup> ERRC, '[Roma in Turkey: More Police Brutality](#)', 5 July 2023

<sup>111</sup> The Kurdish Project, '[About The Kurdish Project](#)', undated

<sup>112</sup> The Kurdish Project, '[Kurdish Newroz](#)', undated

<sup>113</sup> duvaR.english, '[Thousands celebrate Newroz in...several cities across Turkey](#)', 21 March 2022

<sup>114</sup> BBC Monitoring (accessed via subscription), '[Media guide: Turkey](#)' (section 5.3,11.1), 5 May 2023

article entitled 'At least 298 people, including 74 children, detained during Diyarbakır Newroz' which stated:

'...[W]omen were subjected to a thorough search at search points and not allowed in the site due to their national clothes.

'...people who wanted to enter the Newroz site were attacked by the police...

'Law enforcement officers intervened against the people who wanted to enter the Newroz site with rubber bullets, pressurized water and pepper gas.

'A stampede occurred during the interventions and some people were wounded.

'Following the disproportionate intervention of the law enforcement, at least 298 people, including 74 children, were detained for arbitrary reasons.'<sup>115</sup>

10.5.4 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated: 'The Kurdish Newroz celebrations took place despite a heavy police presence and numerous detentions, including HDP executives and members.'<sup>116</sup>

10.5.5 On 19 March 2023, Bianet published an article entitled 'Over 200 detained after İstanbul Newroz celebrations', which stated:

'Police detained more than 200 people after today's...Newroz celebrations in Yenikapı Square in İstanbul's Fatih district.

'The police response began when the crowd was leaving the square after the celebrations were concluded. Officers first surrounded and detained a group of about 60 people who were chanting slogans while walking out of the square.

'The police briefly prevented the people from leaving the square while continuing detentions. More than 150 people were detained and taken to the İstanbul police headquarters.

'...Some people wearing traditional outfits were not allowed in the square, the MP noted. "When we asked for a reason, [the police] only said, 'These are the instructions'."

'Such outfits were mostly [sic] red, yellow and green, Kurds' national colors. Police associate them with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).'

<sup>117</sup>

10.5.6 See also [Women, Conflation with the PKK, Freedom of Assembly](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.6 Journalists and publishing

10.6.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: 'Many Kurdish journalists, including those working in the southeast, have reported threats, physical violence and criminal

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<sup>115</sup> Bianet, ['...298 people, including 74 children, detained during Diyarbakır Newroz'](#), 25 March 2022

<sup>116</sup> European Commission, ['Türkiye 2022 Report'](#) (p18), 12 October 2022

<sup>117</sup> Bianet, ['Over 200 detained after İstanbul Newroz celebrations'](#), 19 March 2023

investigations from state authorities.<sup>118</sup>

10.6.2 Freedom House's 9 March 2023 publication stated:

'Journalists were detained at various protests throughout the year. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Turkey was the world's fourth-largest jailer of journalists in 2022, with 40 journalists in prison at the year's end; the group noted that Turkish authorities had arrested 25 Kurdish journalists in the second half of 2022, all of whom were jailed and charged with terrorism over alleged links to the PKK. Reporters have faced physical attacks, notably those who cover politics, corruption, or crime.'<sup>119</sup>

10.6.3 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated:

'Journalists affiliated or formerly affiliated with pro-Kurdish outlets faced significant government pressure, including incarceration. The government routinely denied press accreditation to Turkish citizens working for international outlets for any association (including volunteer work) with private Kurdish language outlets.

'...Publishers often exercised self-censorship, avoiding works with controversial content (including government criticism, erotic content, or pro-Kurdish content) that might draw legal action. The Turkish Publishers Association reported that publishers faced publication bans and heavy fines if they failed to comply in cases in which a court ordered the correction of offensive content. Authorities also subjected publishers to book promotion restrictions.

'...Nearly all private Kurdish-language newspapers, television channels, and radio stations remained closed on national security grounds under government decrees.'<sup>120</sup>

10.6.4 The same source also stated:

'...[I]n June [2022], 22 media workers, including 20 Kurdish journalists, in Diyarbakir were arbitrarily detained. Sixteen of them were subsequently arrested and charged with "membership in an armed organization." The other six were released under judicial control. In September [2022] a Diyarbakir court rejected a second appeal of the arrest. The lawyer for the detainees stated they did not know what evidence the authorities had.

'...In September [2022] two former reporters from Mesopotamia news agency [a pro-Kurdish news agency that publishes in Kurdish, Turkish and English<sup>121</sup>], Sadiye Eser and Sadik Topaloglu, were sentenced to six years and three months in prison for "being a member of an illegal organization." The sentence was given based on the statements of an anonymous witness who did not attend the hearings and a Kurdish song found on Eser's mobile phone.

'...In February 2021, an Istanbul court convicted former HRA [Human Rights Association] cochair Eren Keskin, two other former editors, and the former publisher of pro-Kurdish daily Ozgur Gundem on terrorism charges and

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<sup>118</sup> DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)' (para 3.63), 10 September 2020

<sup>119</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey](#)' (section D1), 2023

<sup>120</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p37,39,46), 20 March 2023

<sup>121</sup> BBC Monitoring (accessed via a subscription), '[Media guide: Turkey](#)' (section 11.3), 5 May 2023

sentenced them to jail terms ranging from 25 months to more than six years. In the same month, hearings resumed in cases against four other journalists, including Erol Onderoglu, the Turkey representative of Reporters Without Borders, for “promoting terrorist propaganda” in a separate case related to Ozgur Gudem. In 2016, the defendants participated in a solidarity campaign with Ozgur Gudem, serving as the newspaper’s editors for one day each. Prosecutors subsequently filed charges against Onderoglu and other participants. Although an Istanbul court acquitted the four defendants in 2019, prosecutors subsequently appealed. Prosecutors sought up to 14 years in prison for the defendants in the resumed cases. The case was pending at year’s end [2022].

‘...In June [2022] journalist Berivan Altan reported on an attack on a Kurdish family in Ankara and how women and children were being removed from a neighborhood. Altan was later charged with “provoking the people into hatred and animosity.”<sup>122</sup>

10.6.5 On 18 April 2023, the HRFT reported: ‘Ismail Coban, the former editor-in-chief of the Kurdish-language Azadiya Welat newspaper, which was shut down by emergency decree, was arrested in Diyarbakır 5. The final hearing of the case, which was opened in the Heavy Penal Court, was held on April 18, 2023. The court sentenced İsmail Çoban to 1 year and 6 months in prison for “making propaganda for an organization.”<sup>123</sup>

10.6.6 ICNL’s report, published on 24 June 2023, stated:

‘On October 25, 2022, 11 journalists working in two Kurdish media outlets, Mezopotamya Agency (MA) and JINNEWS, were detained in house raids across six cities. Nine of the journalists were sent to prison. The trial of the 11 journalists started seven months later at the Ankara 4th High Criminal Court. The court ruled for the release of the journalists (except for one newspaper distributor), who were charged with “illegal organization membership,” and the court adjourned the hearing to July 5, 2023.’<sup>124</sup>

10.6.7 See also [Kurds in public life](#), [Newroz celebrations](#), and the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Worker's Party \(PKK\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.7 Civil society and cultural rights

10.7.1 The European Commission’s 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated:

‘Serious backsliding regarding the civil society environment continued. Civil society faced continuous pressure and their space to operate freely continued to reduce, limiting their freedom of expression, association and assembly...Despite all these negative developments, civil society continued to be vocal and involved in civic life, and reported on developments as much as possible. Systematic and inclusive mechanisms for the effective consultation of independent civil society organisations on new legislation and

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<sup>122</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...Turkey](#)’ (p14-15,38,45,86), 20 March 2023

<sup>123</sup> HRFT, ‘[18 April 2023 Daily Human Rights Report](#)’, 18 April 2023

<sup>124</sup> ICNL, ‘[Civic Freedom Monitor: Turkey](#)’ (“Legal Analysis”), 24 June 2023

policies need to be put in place.<sup>125</sup>

10.7.2 On 9 March 2023, Freedom House's annual report claimed 'Although Turkey's laws guarantee equal treatment of all citizens, ...ethnic...minorities suffer varying degrees of discrimination...The government's war with the PKK is used to justify discriminatory measures against Kurdish citizens, including the prohibition of Kurdish festivals. Kurdish schools and cultural organizations, many of which had opened while peace talks were taking place, have been investigated or shut down since 2015.'<sup>126</sup>

10.7.3 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated that: 'Hundreds of Kurdish civil society organizations and Kurdish-language media outlets closed by government decree in 2016 and 2017 after the coup attempt remained shut.'<sup>127</sup>

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.8 Government human rights violations

10.8.1 HRW's 2022 World Report, published on 13 January 2022, stated that:

'There was little evidence to suggest prosecutors made progress in investigating the rising allegations of torture and ill-treatment in police custody and prison reported over the past five years. Few such allegations result in prosecution of the security forces, and a pervasive culture of impunity persists.

'...Abductions and enforced disappearances continue to be reported and are not investigated properly. Those disappeared for the longest periods have been individuals the authorities allege have links with the movement run by US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, which Turkey deems a terrorist organization responsible for the July 2016 military coup attempt.

'...Some individuals active in leftist or Kurdish politics reported that plain-clothed security personnel abducted and detained them in undisclosed sites for shorter periods.'<sup>128</sup>

10.8.2 The USSD's 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated: 'There were credible reports that the government contributed to civilian deaths in connection with its fight against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) organization in the southeast, although civilian deaths continued to decline in recent years...Kurdish individuals were disproportionately impacted. The PKK continued to target civilians in its attacks; the government continued to work to block such attacks.

'According to the Human Rights Association (HRA) 2022 report, 96 individuals in the country lost their lives due to armed conflict in the first 11 months of the year, including five civilians and 21 security force members...Human rights groups stated the government took insufficient measures to protect civilian lives in its fight with the PKK.'<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p15), 12 October 2022

<sup>126</sup> Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023 – Turkey](#)' (section F4), 9 March 2023

<sup>127</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p85), 20 March 2023

<sup>128</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2022 – Turkey](#)' (p667,668-669), 13 January 2022

<sup>129</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey](#)' (p3), 20 March 2023



- 10.8.3 On 5 April 2023, AI and HRW jointly published an article entitled ‘Turkey: Police and Gendarmerie Abuses in Earthquake Zone’ which stated:

‘Law enforcement officials sent to police the region devastated by Türkiye’s 6 February earthquakes have beaten, tortured, and otherwise ill-treated people they suspect of theft and looting...One person died in custody after being tortured.

‘...“Credible reports of police, gendarmes and military personnel subjecting people they suspect of crimes, to violent and prolonged beatings and arbitrary, unofficial detention are a shocking indictment of law enforcement practices in Türkiye’s earthquake region,” said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia Director at Human Rights Watch.

“Law enforcement officials are treating the state of emergency for the natural disaster as a license to torture, otherwise ill-treat and even kill with impunity.”

‘Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch interviewed 34 people and, where available, reviewed video footage regarding 13 cases of violence perpetrated by police, gendarmerie — police in rural areas — or soldiers deployed to the area, involving 34 male victims. Researchers heard additional accounts and saw videos of other people being severely beaten by security forces, but were unable to fully corroborate these incidents. The people interviewed included 12 victims of torture or other ill-treatment, two people who gendarmes threatened at gunpoint, witnesses, and lawyers.

‘...All incidents occurred in the 10 provinces covered by a state of emergency, announced by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 7 February and approved by the parliament two days later.’<sup>130</sup>

- 10.8.4 For information about internally displaced persons and curfews as a result of government/PKK clashes and Turkey’s February 2023 earthquake, see [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#), [Curfews](#), the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.9 Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

- 10.9.1 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that:

‘The conflict [between the Turkish government and the PKK] has caused significant internal displacement: between July 2015 and July 2017, approximately 100,000 people lost their homes and up to 400,000 people reportedly moved to neighbouring suburbs, towns and villages, or to other regions within Turkey. In areas where 24-hour curfews were enforced, large numbers of people were forcibly displaced and prevented from returning to their homes until after the conflict had subsided. Many have reportedly not been able to return to their homes.’<sup>131</sup>

- 10.9.2 On 18 March 2021, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a

<sup>130</sup> AI & HRW, ‘[Turkey: Police and Gendarmerie Abuses in Earthquake Zone](#)’, 5 April 2023

<sup>131</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)’ (para 3.6), 10 September 2020



‘General Country of Origin Information Report Turkey’, citing various sources, which stated:

‘According to information from a confidential source, not all displaced persons had returned to their former places of residence. The following dates in this paragraph are from the aforementioned source. Before the wave of violence of 2015/2016, the city of Şırnak had a population of between 60,000 and 65,000. Forty percent of those residents had not returned to Şırnak. At the time of writing, 8,000 displaced persons from Cizre had not returned, nor had 11,000 displaced persons from Nusaybin. For Diyarbakır/Sur, the number of non-returned displaced persons stood at 30,000.

‘The displaced persons who did not return often stayed in villages around the city that they had migrated from or moved to other cities in Southeastern Turkey and other parts of the country. Some of the displaced persons stayed with relatives. Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı (TOKİ), a construction and housing agency of the Turkish government, was responsible for building new homes. In Sur, TOKİ built new homes with a higher value than the previous homes. The new homes were often not affordable for the people who had been displaced.’<sup>132</sup>

10.9.3 The European Commission’s 2022 Turkey Report, published on 12 October 2022, stated: ‘There was no progress on the situation of internally displaced persons resulting from the violence in the south-east in the 1990s and in more recent years.’<sup>133</sup>

10.9.4 On 6 March 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published a report entitled ‘2023 Earthquakes Displacement Overview - Türkiye (March 2023)’ which stated:

‘Within Türkiye, the earthquakes impacted 11 provinces i.e. Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye and Şanlıurfa in East, South-East and Mediterranean (ESEM) region of the country. The affected region is home to 14 million local and 1.8 million migrant population including 7.1 million people residing in hard-hit areas (6.3 million local population and 0.8 million migrants). Present estimates indicate that at least 2.7 million people ‘ including migrants are displaced in various settings including those choosing to stay close to their homes and others moving further away from the place of their usual residence.’<sup>134</sup>

10.9.5 As part of their 2023 focus on water, the MRGI published an undated report entitled ‘Turkey: Water is used as a weapon against Kurdish people in south-eastern Anatolia’ which stated:

‘The Ilisu Dam, the second-largest dam in Turkey, is one of the infrastructure projects built on the Tigris River, close to the border with Iraq and Syria.

‘...The government’s discourse revolves around the idea that the dam will provide economic growth to people in south-east Turkey, and that economic

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<sup>132</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘[...Country of Origin Information...](#)’ (p48), 18 March 2021

<sup>133</sup> European Commission, ‘[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)’ (p20), 12 October 2022

<sup>134</sup> IOM, ‘[2023 Earthquakes Displacement Overview - Türkiye \(March 2023\)](#)’ (p2), 6 March 2023

development will deter local people from joining the Kurdish freedom movement. The government also insisted on the construction of dams to prevent PKK militias from crossing from Iraq to Turkey or moving freely from one region to another.

‘...The destruction of the 12,000-year-old city of Hasankeyf, an important Kurdish heritage site, would impact the social ties of Kurdish people, cutting them off from their history, memory and sense of cultural belonging. The overall goal of the authorities is to undermine Kurdish cultural rights in order to pursue the homogenization of Kurds, and their assimilation within the long-standing campaign of Turkification. In this way, water has played a significant role in shaping domestic politics, resettling minority communities (mainly Kurds) and subjecting minorities to economic, social and political instability.

‘...Approximately 80,000–100,000 Kurds have already been displaced and forced to move to suburbs in nearby cities as a result of the Ilisu Dam. Displaced Kurds do not generally have immediate access to livelihood opportunities. . [sic] Because the displaced Kurdish populations relied on agriculture and livestock, displacement has meant that they have no means to recover from the economic impact or find alternative means of survival. Displacement has caused further cultural and social issues for the Kurds. Kurds who were forced to migrate cannot observe their cultural practices. Some displaced Kurds moved to western parts of Turkey, where they could not easily continue practising their language due to local pressure, stigmatization, marginalization and oppression from majority sectors of Turkish society.’<sup>135</sup>

10.9.6 See also the FFM report, [Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) and the Country Policy and Information Note, [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.10 Curfews

10.10.1 On 9 January 2020, Bianet published an article entitled ‘381 Curfews Declared in 51 Districts, 11 Provinces in 5 Years’ which stated: ‘According to the data shared by the TİHV [Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı - Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT)], 381 curfews were declared in 51 districts and 11 provinces of Turkey between August 16, 2015, when the first curfew was declared in Turkey in recent history, and January 1, 2020.

‘...[T]he highest number of curfews were declared in Turkey’s southeastern province of Diyarbakır.’<sup>136</sup>

10.10.2 The DFAT Turkey Country Information Report, published on 10 September 2020, stated that: ‘In 2019, curfews were implemented less frequently and for shorter durations, and applied to a smaller number of villages than in previous years.’<sup>137</sup>

10.10.3 The USSD 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated:

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<sup>135</sup> MRGI, ‘[Turkey: Water...as a weapon against Kurdish people in south-eastern Anatolia](#)’, undated

<sup>136</sup> Bianet, ‘[381 Curfews Declared in 51 Districts, 11 Provinces in 5 Years](#)’, 9 January 2020

<sup>137</sup> DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Turkey](#)’ (para 3.5), 10 September 2020

‘Authorities issued curfews of varying duration in certain urban and rural areas and decreed “special security zones” in some areas to facilitate counter-PKK operations, which restricted access of visitors and, in some cases, residents.

‘...Some predominantly Kurdish communities experienced government-imposed curfews, generally in connection with government security operations aimed at clearing areas of PKK terrorists...’<sup>138</sup>

10.10.4 See [Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\)](#), a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#), and the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#) for further information.

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.11 Numbers detained in connection with counter-terrorism

10.11.1 HRW’s 2021 World Report, published on 13 January 2021, stated that:

‘Terrorism charges continue to be widely misused to restrict the rights to free expression and association in the fourth year after the coup attempt. As of July 2020, Ministry of Justice and Interior figures stated that 58,409 were on trial and 132,954 still under criminal investigation on terrorism in cases linked to the Gülen movement. Of those 25,912 were held in prison on remand.

‘There are no published official numbers of prisoners held on remand or convicted for alleged links with the PKK, although on the basis of the previous years’ figures the number is at least 8,500 and includes elected politicians and journalists.’<sup>139</sup>

10.11.2 HRW’s 2023 World Report, published on 12 January 2023, stated that ‘At time of writing, at least 65 journalists and media workers were in pretrial detention or serving prison sentences for terrorism offenses because of their journalistic work or association with media.’<sup>140</sup>

10.11.3 The USSD 2022 Country Report, published on 20 March 2023, stated:

‘Since the 2016 coup attempt, authorities have... arrested or imprisoned more than 95,000 citizens...on terrorism-related grounds...

‘Human rights groups noted authorities continued to detain, arrest, and try hundreds of thousands of individuals with alleged ties to the Gulen movement or the PKK under terrorism-related charges...

‘On the sixth anniversary of the 2016 coup attempt in July, the minister of interior announced authorities had detained 332,884 and arrested 101,000 individuals since the coup attempt on grounds of alleged affiliation with the Gulen movement, which the government designated as a terrorist organization. According to the statement, there were still 19,252 Gulen movement detainees in prisons and approximately 24,000 fugitives still being sought. Between July 2021 and July 2022, the government detained 20,763 individuals and arrested 1,877 individuals for connections to the Gulen movement.

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<sup>138</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Turkey’](#) (p29,85), 20 March 2023

<sup>139</sup> HRW, [‘World Report 2021 – Turkey’](#) (p668), 13 January 2021

<sup>140</sup> HRW, [‘World Report 2023 – Turkey’](#) (p606), 12 January 2023

‘...According to human rights organizations, as of November, authorities had prosecuted more than 1,600 lawyers, arrested 615, and sentenced 551 to lengthy prison terms on terrorism-related charges since the 2016 coup attempt.

‘...The government convicted and sentenced hundreds of individuals for exercising their freedom of expression. The government frequently responded to expression critical of it by filing criminal charges alleging affiliation with terrorist groups, terrorism, or otherwise endangering the state...Reports demonstrate that since 2014, more than 160,000 persons were investigated for “insulting the President,” and more than 35,000 went to trial. More than 38,000 persons, including more than 1,000 children, appeared before a judge. Of these trials, 12,881 individuals were convicted and 3,625, including 10 children, were sentenced to prison.

‘...In 38 percent (114) of cases prosecutors charged journalists with terrorism-related charges. The report also found an increase in lawsuits opened against journalists who had participated in peaceful demonstrations and protests as well as an increase in the prison sentences imposed in freedom of expression trials. The report also recorded a record increase in the number of acquittals handed down during the year; 226 persons were acquitted in 51 monitored cases.’<sup>141</sup>

- 10.11.4 See also [Conflation with the PKK](#), the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Kurdistan Worker's Party \(PKK\)](#), [Turkey: Gülenist movement](#), and a HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.12 Treatment in detention

- 10.12.1 The 24 February 2022 publication from Freedom House stated:

‘Turkish authorities are regularly accused of using torture on prisoners - particularly targeting Kurds, Gülenists, and leftists - with impunity. In 2020, two Kurdish farmers were allegedly thrown from a military helicopter after being detained by soldiers; one later died of his injuries. Prosecutors do not consistently investigate allegations of torture or abuse in custody, and the government has resisted the publication of a European Committee for the Prevention of Torture report on its detention practices.’<sup>142</sup>

- 10.12.2 The HRFT’s ‘Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers Report 2021’, published in April 2022, stated:

‘68.9% of the applicants [for treatment and rehabilitation in an HRFT treatment centre due to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in Turkey] stated that their mother tongue is Kurdish and its dialects, whereas the application rate of those whose mother tongue is Turkish is 30.4%. In the applications made to HRFT, it is understood that those holding the Kurdish ethnic identity are subjected to torture more compared to people of other ethnic identities and that this situation has not changed.

‘...Out of the 35 child applicants who applied because they were tortured, 30

<sup>141</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...Turkey](#)’ (p1,11-13,33-34,37-38), 20 March 2023

<sup>142</sup> Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022 – Turkey](#)’ (section F3), 24 February 2022

applied due to the acts of torture they were exposed in Turkey and 5 due to the acts of torture they were exposed to abroad. It was noted that the date of torture was in 2021

'...Mother tongue of the children was Kurdish for 39 (69.7%) of them, Turkish for 10 (17.9%), Persian for 4 (7.1%), and Arabic for 3 (5.4%).'<sup>143</sup>

10.12.3 On 16 September 2022, the HRFT reported that:

'On September 15, 2022, according to media reports, Murat Bilger, a prisoner held in Ankara Sincan No. 3 Type L Prison, had a telephone conversation with his family on the grounds that he spoke Kurdish and was told by the execution protection officers, "You cannot speak Kurdish here. You can only speak Turkish. Otherwise, we will not give you comfort, we will not show you the light of day. We will take disciplinary action" and it was learned that he was threatened.'<sup>144</sup>

10.12.4 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report stated:

'Credible and grave allegations of torture and ill-treatment increased. According to available reports, torture and ill-treatment occurred in detention centres, prisons, in informal places of detention, transportation vehicles and on the streets, mostly during demonstrations. The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (HREI), whose role is to act as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), does not meet the key requirements under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) and is not yet effectively processing cases referred to it. Prison monitoring boards need to be made more effective. The authorities have not authorised the publication of the 2016 and 2021 reports by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). There continued to be a lack of effective investigations into allegations of torture and ill treatment.

'...The overcrowding of the prison system is a serious concern. As of August 2022, the prison population exceeded 320,000 and is the largest in Europe. Türkiye continues to be the Council of Europe Member State with the highest overcrowding rate. Although the human rights action plan contained some measures to improve living conditions in prisons, allegations of human rights violations including arbitrary restrictions on the rights of detainees, denial of access to medical care, mistreatment, limitation on open visits and solitary confinement continued to be reported. Investigations into allegations of suicides, strip search and discriminatory behaviour by prison guards, remained limited. Hunger strikes in some prisons continued to demand the end to violations of detainees' rights... There are concerns related to the independence of the Forensic Medicine Institute as it operates under the Ministry of Justice and often ignores medical reports. Decisions requiring access to medical care for sick inmates are often delayed or denied, causing death in prison or soon after release.'<sup>145</sup>

10.12.5 On 18 January 2023, the HRFT reported that: '...[I]t was learned from media reports that a disciplinary investigation was opened against İhsan Uğur, the

<sup>143</sup> HRFT, '[Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres Report 2021](#)' (p54,127), April 2022

<sup>144</sup> HRFT, '[16 September 2022 Daily Human Rights Report](#)', 16 September 2022

<sup>145</sup> European Commission, '[Türkiye 2022 Report](#)' (p33-34), 12 October 2022



former co-mayor of Hizan who was held in Diyarbakır No. 2 High Security Prison, for speaking Kurdish with a person in the hospital where he was taken, and at the end of the investigation, İhsan Uğur was sentenced to 1 month of deprivation of the right to sports and conversation.<sup>146</sup>

10.12.6 On 20 June 2023, the HRFT reported that: ‘...[M]edia reports reported that inmates in Ankara’s Sincan Women’s Prison, who were speaking Kurdish among themselves, were heard saying, “Don’t speak Kurdish, speak Turkish. If you live in Turkey, you will speak Turkish” and it was learned that they were forced to speak Turkish.’<sup>147</sup>

10.12.7 On 7 July 2023, the HRFT reported that:

‘...[I]t was learned from media reports that 1 Kurdish books sent to Ozan Alpkaya, who is being held in Ankara Sincan No. 17 High Security Prison, were not given to the prisoner. In the press report, the prisoner’s question on the subject was answered by saying, “The Prison Education Commission can only examine the Turkish books sent. If you want the Kurdish books sent to you to reach you, you will write two petitions: I want an interpreter for my Kurdish books in the first petition. In the second petition, I demand that the translator’s money be deducted from my account after the Kurdish books sent to me are read and approved by the translator.”’<sup>148</sup>

10.12.8 In their 8-10 July 2023 daily report, the HRFT stated that: ‘On July 7, 2023, it was learned from the news in the press that the newspapers Yeni Yaşam and Evrensel were not given to the prisoners in Diyarbakır No. 1 High Security Prison, that the meals given to the prisoners were not adequate and hygienic, that the prices of the products sold in the canteen were high, that the Kurdish books and magazines sent were not given to the prisoners even though they were not banned.’<sup>149</sup>

10.12.9 See also the Country Policy and Information Note, [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#) and FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.13 Conditions of release from detention

10.13.1 The HO’s October 2019 FFM Report stated:

‘The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated, ‘Sabri Ok is one example of a Kurdish prisoner suspected of PKK involvement; as a condition of release from prison, he was forced to do military service for Turkey as a way of humiliating him and sending a warning to others.’ However, it is difficult to assess whether this is true or whether, simply, military service is compulsory for Turkish nationals.

‘Sebnem Financi of the HRFT stated, “In police custody there is sometimes conditions to the release, signing a blank document, but can be arrested a couple of days later again. The blank document could be a range of things, but it would be a confession of something. Sometimes they do not need to

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<sup>146</sup> HRFT, [‘18 January 2023 Daily Human Rights Report’](#), 18 January 2023

<sup>147</sup> HRFT, [‘20 June 2023 Daily Human Rights Report’](#), 20 June 2023

<sup>148</sup> HRFT, [‘7 July 2023 Daily Human Rights Report’](#), 7 July 2023

<sup>149</sup> HRFT, [‘8 – 10 July 2023 Daily Human Rights Report’](#), 10 July 2023



go back to prison if they have already served enough time.”

‘Andrew Gardner of Amnesty International stated, “There are many reports on people being released after arrest and detention on the condition of being an informant for the police.” An executive from the Human Rights Association pointed to [their report on the subject](#). They suggested that Kurdish university students and journalists are the main targets to be forced to become informants. The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK also believed the authorities attempt to recruit Kurds as informants, especially if the family is involved in politics.

‘The representative from the Ministry of Justice stated that a person is not monitored on release from detention unless there is a reasonable suspicion against them, in which case, law enforcement officers will monitor or investigate in line with the rule of law. A person may be given parole on certain conditions, but if they commit a further crime, they must serve the remainder of the sentence.

‘The Director of a Turkish organisation in the UK stated, “The authorities continue to watch a person once they have been released as they are likely to become more politicised in prison, and to be angered by being imprisoned, and quite possibly been treated badly whilst there. A person may be imprisoned multiple times.” The same person stated that a person may be required to report regularly to the police, whether they are high-profile or not.

‘The human rights lawyer said:

“When people are arrested on charges of terrorism, the authorities still track people after they have been released from prison and by the time they get to the prison gate, they are arrested again on different charges. Prosecutors can object to your release. HDP MPs were being released in 2017, and the prosecutor would object, but this is illegal. There was not a legal ground for that, however they brought an amendment with state of emergency decrees for such legal grounds. They do this to anyone they do not like.”

‘Sebnem Financi of HRFT stated, “After detention, you have your passport taken away from you, they are on probation, they can’t travel, academics have been dismissed from jobs.”<sup>150</sup>

10.13.2 See also the Country Policy and Information Note, [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers’ Party \(PKK\)](#) and FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.14 Judicial system

10.14.1 The HO’s October 2019 FFM Report stated:

‘Sebnem Financi of HRFT declared, “Lawyers do not wish to represent people from Gulenist movement and some nationalist Bar Associations of the western cities had problems with Kurds as well.” Ms Financi further stated that not all Kurdish people have sufficient funds or are fully aware of legal processes, but there are lawyers, such as Ozgurlukcu Hukukcular Dernegi, who offer their services to the Kurdish people. She added that

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<sup>150</sup> HO FFM report, [‘Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK’](#) (p47-48), October 2019

political prisoners have contacts for lawyers, and most people have access to lawyers through friends who would make arrangements outside prison.

'...The representative from the Turkish Ministry of Justice stated that the right of suspects and accused persons to use their own language is protected. A public prosecutor or judge must provide a translator if the person cannot speak Turkish and the State will pay for this. If the person can speak Turkish but states that they would prefer to make their defence or submission in Kurdish, for example, they are allowed to do so, but in this case, the person must pay for the translator. The representative from the Ministry of Justice confirmed that translators are provided if parties to the trial case require them.'<sup>151</sup>

10.14.2 The European Commission's 2022 Turkey Report stated:

'The serious backsliding observed since 2016 continued during the reporting period. Concerns remained, in particular over the systemic lack of independence of the judiciary and undue pressure on judges and prosecutors. Particular concerns relating to the judiciary's adherence to international and European standards increased, in particular in relation to the refusal to implement rulings by the [ECtHR]...Only 515 judges or prosecutors dismissed following the coup attempt were reinstated, despite several being acquitted. The lack of objective, merit-based, standardised and pre-established criteria for recruiting and promoting judges and prosecutors remains a source of concern.'<sup>152</sup>

10.14.3 See also the Country Policy and Information Note, [Turkey: Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\)](#) and FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## 10.15 Military service

10.15.1 For information about military service in Turkey and the treatment of Kurds, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Turkey: Military service](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

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<sup>151</sup> HO FFM report, [Turkey: Kurds, the HDP and the PKK](#) (p33,35), October 2019

<sup>152</sup> European Commission, [Türkiye 2022 Report](#) (p5-6), 12 October 2022

# Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The Home Office uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background
  - History
  - Demography
  - Legal and constitutional framework, including anti-discrimination legislation and anti-terrorism laws
- Treatment of Kurds
  - Language and education
  - Employment
  - Kurdish people holding political positions
  - Kurdish people supporting the government
  - Accommodation
  - Life and integration outside the southeast
  - Newroz celebrations
  - Societal violence and hate speech
  - Impact of coup attempt of 2016
  - State treatment of Kurds
  - Police treatment of Kurds
  - Treatment by the judicial system
  - Treatment in detention
  - Military Service

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

# Version control and feedback

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **17 October 2023**

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### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

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### Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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[Back to Contents](#)

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment.

[Back to Contents](#)

## Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

## Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

[Back to Contents](#)