

# **Türkiye (Turkey) 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

In March local elections, citizens were able to exercise their right to vote freely among genuine political alternatives but expressed concerns regarding media bias, media censorship, and restrictions on freedoms of association and expression, which created an uneven playing field and contributed to an unfair advantage for the ruling party. Despite these impediments, candidates from political opposition parties won a number of parliamentary seats and mayorships.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; transnational repression against individuals in another country; witting cooperation with other countries to facilitate acts of transnational repression; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by government-supported armed groups outside of the country; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence and threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, or censorship.

The government took limited steps to identify and punish some officials who committed human rights abuses.

Clashes between security forces and terrorist organization the Kurdistan Workers' Party and its affiliates continued and resulted in the injury or death of security force members, terrorists, and civilians in cross-border actions in Syria and Iraq. The government did not release information on efforts to investigate or prosecute its personnel for the wrongful or inadvertent deaths of civilians linked to counterterrorism operations.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

There were reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

On July 16, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that in March 2023, Turkish border guards intercepted and inflicted severe injuries upon a group of eight Syrians who attempted to enter the country from Syria, killing a boy and a man. HRW stated the migrants faced severe mistreatment, including beatings and assault with batons, rifle butts, a ladder, and pliers. Domestic media reported a court placed three of the guards in pretrial detention and conditionally released three others pending an investigation. There were no developments on this case as of October.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

## **c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses**

Occasional clashes between Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its affiliates in the country continued throughout the year and in some instances resulted in civilian deaths and injuries. The government continued security operations against the PKK throughout the country and in parts of Syria and Iraq. 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. Portions of Hakkari Province and rural portions of Tunceli Province remained "special security zones."

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported Turkish-supported Syrian armed opposition groups (TSOs) in northern Syria committed human rights abuses, reportedly targeting Kurdish and Yezidi residents and other civilians, including extrajudicial killings, the arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of civilians, torture, sexual violence, forced evacuations from

homes, looting and seizure of private property, transfer of detained civilians across the border into Türkiye, recruitment or use of child soldiers, and the looting and destruction of religious sites.

For more information, see the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for Syria.

PKK tactics included targeted killings and assault with conventional weapons, vehicle-borne bombs, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). At times, IEDs and unexploded ordnance, usually attributed to the PKK, killed or maimed civilians and security forces. In Syria, TSO clashes with groups the Turkish government considered to be affiliated with the PKK resulted in civilian deaths. On December 20, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and a number of western media outlets reported a suspected Turkish drone attack on a vehicle that was marked "Press" in northern Syria killed two journalists.

The PKK regularly abducted or attempted to abduct civilians in both Türkiye and Syria.

The NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice reported TSOs detained and unlawfully transferred Syrian nationals through Türkiye.

An August 12 report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic noted the presence of Turkish officials in TSO detention facilities, including in interrogation sessions where torture was

used. Human rights groups alleged police, other government security forces, and the PKK abused some civilian residents of the southeast. There was little accountability for mistreatment by government authorities.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of expression, within certain limits, and freedom of the press. The government restricted freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media. Multiple articles in the penal code directly restricted freedom of the press and other media platforms and free speech through broad provisions that prohibited praising a crime or criminals or inciting the population to enmity, hatred, or denigration, as well as provisions that purported to protect public order and criminalized insulting the state, the president, government officials, and “religious values.” The law also limited free expression online through a law that criminalized “disseminating false information” without establishing clear guidelines and allowed for the fining of media outlets.

The government prosecuted and jailed journalists, hindering freedom of expression in the country. Media professionals reported self-censorship was widespread amid fear criticizing the government could prompt reprisals. These prosecutions affected not only journalists, publishers, streamers, or influencers, but also citizens who participated in street interviews and

informal social media posts. Citizens were arrested under broad insult laws for commenting critically on the government.

Individuals in many cases could not criticize the state or government publicly without risk of civil or criminal suits or investigation, and the government restricted expression by individuals sympathetic to some religious, political, or cultural viewpoints. Those who wrote or spoke on sensitive topics or in ways critical of the government risked job loss, abuse by officials in the justice system, fines, and imprisonment. 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, citing national security grounds. The application of insult laws was also used to limit freedom of expression.

The law provided 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 groups noted the law was used primarily to restrict freedom of expression rather than to protect members of minority groups.

Under the rules of procedure, members of parliament could be reprimanded or temporarily expelled from the assembly due to the usage of the word

“Kurdistan” or other sensitive terms on the floor of parliament. Authorities did not uniformly implement this procedure.

In August, HRW reported on the government’s crackdown on Kurdish cultural expressions, particularly wedding songs and dances, which it labeled “terrorist propaganda.”

On August 13, Dilruba in Izmir was arrested after she criticized the government’s nine-day Instagram ban in a street interview shared on YouTube. She was taken into custody, charged with “insulting the president” and “provoking the public to animosity and hatred,” put under arrest, and jailed. The charge of “insulting the president” was often used broadly against those who expressed dissent, with thousands of individuals convicted under this law.

The government criminalized “disseminating false information” with a penalty of up to three years in prison, creating an environment of self-censorship and fear. The law allowed the government to block a website or remove content if there was sufficient suspicion the website was committing any number of crimes, including insulting the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, or insulting the president. The government could also block websites to protect national security and public order. At times, authorities blocked some news and information websites that had content criticizing government policies. The law also allowed persons who believed a website violated their personal rights to ask

the regulatory body to order internet service providers (ISPs) to remove offensive content. Government leaders, including the president, reportedly employed staff to monitor the internet and initiate charges against individuals perceived as insulting them.

The government at times blocked access to cloud-based services and permanently blocked access to many virtual private networks. There was credible evidence the government monitored private online communications. The law provided for government authorities to access internet users' records to "protect national security, public order, health, and decency" or to prevent crime. The judicial system was responsible for informing content providers of ordered blocks.

The Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) was empowered, as were government ministers, to demand ISPs remove content or block websites with four hours' notice. The regulatory body was required to refer the matter within 24 hours to a judge, who typically ruled on the matter within 48 hours. If it was not technically possible to remove individual content within the specified time, the entire website could be blocked. ISP administrators who did not comply with the court order could face a fine, calculated as a fee equivalent of 500 to 3,000 days, where the number of days indicated the court's assessment of the severity of the offense. Likewise, the BTK could impose a 10,000 to 100,000 Turkish lira fine (\$288 to \$2,880) if the ISP administrators did not carry out a BTK



content removal order. In cases of further noncompliance, the BTK could cancel the license of the ISP. In cases in which content was deemed to be a risk to national security, public health, or a similarly critical issue, ISP administrators could face fines ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 Turkish lira (\$1,440 to \$14,400).

The president appointed the BTK president, vice president, and members of the agency. The government required ISPs, including internet cafes, to use BTK-approved filtering tools that blocked specific content. Additional internet restrictions were in place in government and university buildings. According to *EngelliWeb*, confirmed incidences of internet censorship over time indicated the government had blocked more than 953,415 domains, approximately 260,000 URLs, and more than 67,100 posts on X.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

Government and political leaders and their supporters used a variety of means to intimidate and pressure journalists, including through lawsuits, threats, and, in some cases, physical attacks. Violence against journalists was perpetrated by individuals and groups that included persons with alleged ties to political parties. Journalists alleged such groups were involved in the systematic intimidation of critical, opposition opinion. The CPJ asserted attacks on journalists were rarely prosecuted. Victims publicly expressed a belief that law enforcement agencies were not interested in prosecuting the crimes.

The government routinely filed terrorism-related charges against individuals or media in response to reporting on sensitive topics, particularly government efforts against PKK terrorism and the Gülen movement. Human rights groups and journalists asserted the government did this to target and intimidate journalists and the public for speech perceived as critical of the state.

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 or for any association (including volunteer work) with private Kurdish language outlets.

Media Freedom Rapid Response, a Europe wide mechanism tracking press freedom, reported that after local elections in March, journalists in the eastern part of the country faced physical attacks and obstruction by police while covering public protests against a decision by electoral authorities to block the elected mayor of Van, Abdullah Zeydan, from taking office. Several journalists covering the protests were also detained.

### **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

Government and political leaders maintained direct and indirect censorship of media and books. Mainstream print media and television stations were

largely controlled by progovernment holding companies heavily influenced by the ruling party. Only a small fraction of the holding companies' profits came from media revenue, and their other commercial interests impeded media independence, encouraged a climate of self-censorship, and limited the scope of public debate.

Between September 1, 2023, and July 20, the Media and Law Studies Association monitored 281 trials and found that 366 journalists (approximately one-fifth of all cases) were prosecuted. Politicians, lawyers, academics, and artists were also frequently taken to court for expressing their views.

Many of these cases were initiated related to criticism of government officials or participation in social protests. Journalists were specifically targeted for their news stories and commentary. Among 187 defendants charged with "membership in an armed (terrorist) organization," 64 percent were journalists.

Other common accusations against journalists included "insulting the president" and "insulting a public official." Additionally, Article 217/A of the penal code – referred to as the "censorship law" – was increasingly used to prosecute journalists for allegedly spreading "misleading information to the public," often in response to reporting critical of the government.

Government prosecution of journalists limited media freedom throughout

the year. Authorities subjected some writers and publishers to prosecution on grounds of defamation, denigration, obscenity, separatism, terrorism, subversion, fundamentalism, or insulting religious values. Authorities investigated or continued court cases against a myriad of publishers on these grounds. Authorities also exercised censorship over online media. In several cases, the government barred journalists under judicial controls from traveling outside the country, including by using electronic monitoring.

While the law did not prohibit specific books or publications, court decisions resulted in bans for the distribution or sale of certain books and periodicals. The Press Advertisement Board, which had the authority to impose advertising bans, extended press ethics obligations to websites and social media accounts of newspapers. Bookstores did not carry books by some opposition political figures.

Publishers often exercised self-censorship, avoiding works with controversial content (including government criticism, erotic content, or pro-Kurdish content) that might draw legal action. 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. In some cases, prosecutors considered the possession of some Kurdish-language, pro-Kurdish, or Gülen movement books to be credible evidence of membership in a terror organization.

Some journalists reported their employers asked them to censor their

reporting if it appeared critical of the government or jeopardized other business interests and fired them if they failed to comply. Journalist organizations also reported that due to a fear of government backlash, companies were unwilling to purchase ads in critical or opposition outlets. These pressures contributed to an atmosphere of self-censorship in which media reporting continued to be standardized along progovernment lines.

According to Media Freedom Rapid Response's assessment, in the first half of the year, 76 press and media freedom abuses were committed in the country, impacting 114 media-related persons or entities. Almost two-thirds of these abuses were legal cases, followed by verbal attacks, censorship and interference in journalistic work, physical attacks, and attacks against property of media workers. More than one-third of the legal cases resulted in arrest, detention, or imprisonment.

On April 24, the official Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) canceled Açık Radyo's (Open Radio) streaming license without a court decision on the grounds a guest used the phrase "Armenian genocide" in an episode. After an initial suspension of RTÜK's decision, on October 11, the station's broadcast license was canceled, resulting in Açık Radyo being shut down the same day.

The PKK used intimidation to limit freedom of expression and other constitutional rights in the southeast of the country. Some journalists, political party representatives, and residents reported pressure,

intimidation, and threats if they spoke out against the PKK or praised government security forces.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

The law provided for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, but it placed significant restrictions on these rights. The law prohibited antiunion discrimination and discouraged employers from terminating workers involved in union activities. In particular, the law required employers to either reinstate a worker fired for participating in union activity or to pay enhanced compensation of at least one year of the affected worker's salary if a court found the worker was unfairly terminated for participating in union activities. If an employer opted not to reinstate workers to their former roles, the law required the employer to pay union compensation and an additional fine of four to eight months' wages.

Some public-sector employees, such as senior officials, magistrates, members of the armed forces, and police, could not form or join unions. Migrant workers and domestic servants without valid work permits were prohibited from joining unions, and nonunionized workers were not covered by collective bargaining laws.

The government effectively enforced laws protecting freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers.

Penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were less than those for analogous crimes such as civil rights violations, and penalties were rarely applied against violators.

The law provided only some workers the right to strike. A 2014 Constitutional Court ruling that bankers and municipal transport workers had the right to strike remained in force. While the law allowed some essential workers to bargain collectively, it required workers to resolve disputes through binding arbitration rather than strikes. The law further allowed the government to deny the right to strike in any situation that represented a threat to public health or national security.

The government also maintained restrictions on the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. The law required labor unions to notify government officials prior to meetings or rallies, which were required to take place in officially designated areas. The law allowed government representatives to attend union conventions and record proceedings.

The law required a minimum of seven workers to establish a union without prior approval. To become a bargaining agent, a union was required to represent 40 percent of worksite employees and 1 percent of all workers in their industry. The law prohibited union leaders from becoming officers of or otherwise performing duties for political parties. The law also prohibited

union leaders from working for or being involved in the operation of any profit-making enterprise.

Labor courts functioned effectively and relatively efficiently, although as with other courts, the appeals process could often last for years.

The government and employers interfered with freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Government restrictions and interference limited the ability of some unions to conduct public and other activities. Police frequently attended union meetings and conventions. In addition, some unions reported local authorities prohibited public activities, such as marches and press conferences.

Employers used threats, violence, and layoffs in unionized workplaces. Unions stated antiunion discrimination occurred regularly across sectors. Manufacturing and service-sector union organizers reported private-sector employers sometimes ignored the law and dismissed workers to discourage union activity. Many employers hired workers on revolving contracts of less than a year's duration, making them ineligible for equal benefits or bargaining rights.

According to the Worker Rights Consortium, in December 2023, Ozak Tekstil's factory in Şanlıurfa, which exclusively made jeans for Levi Strauss and Company, fired approximately 400 workers after they participated in a strike. Ozak Tekstil claimed the workers refused to return to work and that



the union did not have enough members to collectively bargain and organize a strike. Levi's reportedly acknowledged the mass firings violated its supplier code of conduct and that it had instructed Ozak Tekstil to reinstate the workers. Ozak Tekstil did not, however, reinstate all the fired workers. The company told CNN it had offered to reinstate most of the workers, but without the workers' right to continue with the strike, and only a handful accepted the offer.

In July, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security released data that revealed a slight decrease in union membership nationwide and that 2.5 million of the country's 16.8 million workers belonged to a union.

## **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

The law provided for a minimum wage that applied to all sectors. The national minimum wage was less than the official estimate for the poverty income level.

The law established a 45-hour workweek with a weekly rest day. Overtime was limited to three hours per day and 270 hours a year. The law mandated

paid holiday and leave and premium pay for overtime but allowed for employers and employees to agree to a flexible time schedule.

Workers in nonunionized sectors had difficulty receiving overtime pay they were entitled to by law. The law prohibited excessive compulsory overtime.

Private-sector employees, particularly in low-wage service sector roles such as janitors, alleged it was common to be denied overtime pay, and the only recourse was to take their employers to court to request overtime compensation or to resolve other violations of wage and hour laws.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

Government occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not appropriate for the main industries. The government did not engage in proactive efforts to identify unsafe conditions and generally only responded to workers' OSH complaints. In many sectors, including mining, workers could not remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, and authorities did not effectively protect vulnerable employees.

OSH violations were particularly common in the construction and mining industries, where accidents were frequent and regulations inconsistently enforced. The Workers' Health and Work Safety Assembly reported at least 878 workplace deaths in the first six months of the year, with the highest number coinciding with the increase in seasonal work during the summer

months (mobilization and increase in production, mainly in the agricultural sector). The highest number of deaths occurred in the construction sector followed by the agriculture and forestry, transportation, and housing sectors. Additionally, 66 child laborers died between September 2023 and August. Among these, 24 children were in the agriculture sector, 17 in an industrial sector, 13 in the construction sector, and 12 in the service sector.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security's Labor Inspectorate was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws. The government effectively enforced wage and hour provisions in the unionized industrial, service, and government sectors but not in other sectors. The government did not effectively enforce OSH laws in all sectors. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence but were rarely applied against violators. The number of labor inspectors remained insufficient to enforce compliance with labor laws across the country. Labor inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions, but inspections were mainly used to follow up on complaints.

According to *World Economics 2023* statistics, the country's informal economy represented 31 percent of GDP. The government rarely enforced labor laws in this sector.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but numerous credible reports indicated the government did not always observe these requirements.

In February, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention noted a significant increase in the number of cases brought to it concerning arbitrary detention and expressed its concern regarding the pattern these cases followed.

The law required prosecutors to issue warrants for arrests unless the suspect was detained while committing a crime. The law also required suspects be brought promptly before a judicial officer and charged with a crime. The period for arraignment could be extended for up to four days. These rights were generally respected. Formal arrest, separate from detention, provided for a suspect to be held in jail until court-ordered release. For crimes that carried potential prison sentences of less than three

years, a judge could release the accused after arraignment upon receipt of an appropriate assurance, such as bail. For more serious crimes, judges could either release the defendant on their own recognizance or hold the defendant in custody (arrest) prior to trial if there were specific facts indicating the suspect might flee, attempt to destroy evidence, or attempt to pressure or tamper with witnesses or victims.

While the law generally provided detainees the right to immediate access to an attorney of their choice, it allowed judges to deny such access for up to 24 hours. In criminal cases, the law also required the government to provide indigent detainees with a public attorney if they requested one. In cases involving a potential prison sentence for conviction of more than five years or in which the defendant was a child or a person with disabilities, a defense attorney was appointed even absent a request from the defendant. Human rights observers noted in most cases authorities provided an attorney if a defendant could not afford one. The government could detain without charge (or appearance before a judge) a suspect under suspicion of terror-related crimes for 48 hours for “individual” offenses and 96 hours for “collective” offenses. These periods could be extended twice with the approval of a judge, amounting to six days for “individual” and 12 days for “collective” offenses.

The law gave prosecutors the right to suspend lawyer-client privilege and to observe and record conversations between accused persons and their legal

counsel. Some lawyers defending persons accused of terrorism faced criminal charges themselves. In June, the Human Rights Association released its annual report on prisons in the country, finding at least 23,899 legal rights violations in prisons throughout 2023 based on complaints from inmates, their lawyers, or family members. Violations were reported across 147 facilities in 50 provinces in which the majority – 17,218 incidents – involved torture and mistreatment such as beatings and strip searches. The report also highlighted arbitrary restrictions on outdoor activities, damage to personal belongings, communication limitations, and delays in granting parole to eligible prisoners. Additionally, it criticized prison monitoring boards for denying parole to political prisoners based on arbitrary criteria.

Although the law prohibited holding a suspect arbitrarily or secretly, there were numerous reports the government did not observe these prohibitions. Human rights groups alleged that in areas under curfew or in “special security zones,” security forces detained citizens without official record, leaving detainees at greater risk of arbitrary abuse.

Prolonged pretrial detention was a problem, particularly in politically motivated cases. Maximum pretrial detention periods, including all extensions, were set by the severity of the offense. For offenses that did not incur heavy penalties, the maximum pretrial detention period was 18 months; for offenses that incurred heavy penalties, the maximum pretrial detention period was five years; and for offenses against the security of the

state, national defense, constitutional order, state secrets and espionage, organized crime, and terrorism-related offenses, the maximum pretrial detention period was seven years.

Pretrial detention during the investigation phase of a case (before an indictment) was limited to six months for cases that did not fall under the purview of the Heavy Criminal Court, and one year for cases that fell under the Heavy Criminal Court. For terrorism-related cases, the maximum period of pretrial detention during the investigation phase (pre-indictment) was two years.

The length of pretrial detention sometimes exceeded the maximum sentence for the alleged crimes.

Rule of law advocates asserted broad use of pretrial detention had become a form of summary punishment, particularly in cases that involved politically motivated terrorism charges. Chief prosecutors had discretion, particularly under the wide-ranging counterterrorism law, to keep individuals they deemed dangerous to public security in pretrial detention.

Gültan Kışanak, former co-mayor of Diyarbakır, remained in pretrial detention despite having served the maximum period of seven years in pretrial detention until a court sentenced her to time served and released her on May 16. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled the detention violated her rights, finding the detention lacked sufficient

justification, and that her right to a fair trial had been compromised. The ECHR also highlighted her detention prevented her from participating in 2018 parliamentary elections.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Justice, as of September, 52,066 persons were held in pretrial detention, accounting for approximately 15 percent of the overall prison population.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

#### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **Section 3. Security of the Person**

#### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports some police officers, prison authorities, and military and intelligence units employed them. Domestic human rights organizations, bar



associations, political opposition figures, international human rights groups, and others reported government agents engaged in threats and mistreatment of persons while in custody. In July, the UN Committee Against Torture expressed concern regarding an increase in allegations of torture and mistreatment in the context of counterterrorism operations. Human rights organizations reported individuals allegedly affiliated with the Gülen movement and the PKK were subjected to torture, mistreatment, or abuse. For example, in October, six UN special rapporteurs and the chair of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances noted reports law enforcement authorities subjected children allegedly affiliated with the Gülen movement to “physical torture” and that the children were “threatened with physical beatings that would ‘make [them] vomit blood.’”

Human rights groups reported police abused detainees outside police station premises and alleged police abuse and mistreatment were more prevalent in some police facilities, particularly in parts of the southeast.

In July, the UN Committee Against Torture reported torture and mistreatment continued to occur, including beatings and sexual assault by law enforcement officers.

According to reports, authorities used violence and threats of violence against lawyers defending clients who faced politically sensitive charges.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

### **Child Soldiers**

The Secretary of State determined Türkiye supported armed groups that recruited or used child soldiers during the period of April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **Child Marriage**

The minimum legal age for marriage was 18, although children could marry at 17 with parental permission and at 16 with court approval. Authorities effectively enforced the law. The law acknowledged civil and religious marriages, but the latter were not always registered with the state.

NGOs reported children as young as age 12 were sometimes married in unofficial religious ceremonies, particularly in poor and rural regions and in the Syrian community in the country. Women's rights groups stated there were instances of forced marriages and bride kidnapping, particularly in rural areas in the southeast of the country, although the practices were not

widespread. Local NGOs worked to educate and raise awareness in southeastern provinces.

In September, a court sentenced Kadir İsekli to 36 years in prison for child sexual abuse and serial sexual assault related to his illegal marriage to a child, age six, in 2004. The charges were brought by his “wife,” who filed for divorce after she reached adulthood. The former child bride’s father was sentenced to 18 years and nine months for accessory to child sexual abuse. The case, originally tried in 2023, was overturned and retried during the year in a successful bid to seek longer sentences for both of the child’s parents. Women’s rights NGOs hailed the case as an important deterrent for “religious marriages” of children.

### **c. Protection to Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

This cooperation extended to addressing the needs of the 3.3 million refugees and asylum seekers in the country, 3.1 million of whom were Syrians. While cooperation with UNHCR and other organizations was generally maintained, problems, including case overload, continued to rise. In response to increasing political pressure following the March municipal

elections, social and economic pressure in the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes, and the continued rise of antirefugee sentiments, the government continued to crack down on undocumented migrants, implementing stricter border enforcement and increasing deportations and police operations targeting the population, often without adequate consideration for asylum claims. In February, the government reported it increased the number of mobile migration units to 162, of which 103 were posted in Istanbul.

During these operations, there were allegations of police misconduct, including unauthorized entry into homes to verify identification, stopping individuals perceived to be foreign for document checks, and sending some migrants to removal centers without due process. From January to August, the government reported capturing more than 146,000 irregular migrants, most of them Afghan and Syrian nationals.

The government's push for the voluntary return of refugees continued, with concerns that returns were not always entirely voluntary, particularly in deportation and removal centers where there were serious allegations of torture and beatings. The government continued to assert some areas in northwest Syria under Turkish control were safe for return; however, UN assessments indicated mass return to Syria was not a viable option.

## **Provision of First Asylum**

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees, but it limited the rights granted in the 1951 Refugee Convention to apply only to refugees from Europe and restricted the movement of persons under temporary or conditional status.

The law provided regulatory guidelines for foreigners' entry into, presence in, and exit from the country, and provided for the protection of asylum seekers. The law did not impose a strict time limit to apply for asylum and required only that asylum seekers did so "within a reasonable time" after arrival. The law also did not require asylum seekers to present a valid identity document to apply for status.

Asylum seekers continued to face significant difficulties in access to registration, particularly Afghans and recently arrived Syrian nationals. In August, Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya declared the borders with Syria were closed to additional migration, with no registration of Syrian asylum seekers since June 2022.

UNHCR had access to some removal centers where foreigners, including persons under temporary and international protection, were detained. There were reports from refugee-rights NGOs and bar associations authorities prevented or limited them from accessing clients and asylum

seekers at risk of deportation. UNHCR worked with the government to provide access to asylum procedures for persons in need of protection, including through access to information, interpretation, and legal aid.

#### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

Approximately 12,000 to 16,000 Jews were estimated to live in the country. Some members of the community continued to emigrate or seek to obtain citizenship in a second country, in part due to concerns regarding antisemitism. Jewish citizens also expressed concern regarding security threats. Antisemitic rhetoric, which surged after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel in October 2023, continued in print media and on social media throughout the year, as did episodes of harassment of Jewish citizens.

For further information on incidents of antisemitism in the country, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, see the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

#### **e. Instances of Transnational Repression**

The government engaged in a worldwide effort to apprehend suspected members of the Gülen movement. There were credible reports the government exerted bilateral pressure on other countries to take adverse

action against specific individuals, at times without due process. According to credible reports during the year, the government also knowingly cooperated with other governments to facilitate acts of transnational repression, including in cases against Central Asian dissidents, activists, and journalists.

### **Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, or Violence or Threats of Violence**

There were credible allegations Turkish intelligence forces kidnapped alleged members of the Gülen movement in foreign countries and returned them to Türkiye to stand trial.

### **Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, or Coercion**

Relatives of individuals who fled from the country due to fear of politically motivated abuse reported security forces used threats and intimidation to pressure them to reveal the individual's location or encourage those who had fled to return to the country.

### **Misuse of International Law Enforcement Tools**

There were credible reports the government attempted to use INTERPOL (the International Police Organization) red notices to target specific individuals located outside the country, alleging ties to terrorism based on little evidence. On February 20, the *New York Times* reported, as part of its

investigation into governments' misuse of INTERPOL to pursue dissidents, the government used red notices against 773 Gülen followers in 2021 and subsequently canceled their passports or refused to renew them. The report also detailed the government's use of INTERPOL's database of lost and stolen passports as a tool to harass dissidents or strand them abroad.

### **Efforts to Control Mobility**

There were reports the government attempted to control mobility to exact reprisal against citizens abroad by refusing to renew the passports of some citizens with temporary residency permits in other countries, on political grounds. The government often claimed such citizens were members of Gülen movement organizations; those individuals were frequently unable to travel outside their countries of residence.

In June, Freedom House released a report documenting the targeting of dissidents and government critics with forms of repression that prevented them from doing their work and participating in society, including denying the ability to travel, physical monitoring, blacklisting from employment or government services, and seizure of assets. The report found those facing open investigations had been deemed "unfit" to have a passport, even before any verdict was handed down in their cases. Additionally, imprisoned journalists had been released under restrictive measures that included international travel bans.



## **Bilateral Pressure**

There was evidence the government applied bilateral pressure on other governments to secure their assistance with renditions without full due process and couched such requests as cooperation on countering terrorism.

In October, Kenya confirmed it had returned four registered Turkish refugees allegedly connected to the Gülen movement at the request of the Turkish government.

## **Knowing Cooperation with Other Governments to Facilitate Their Acts of Transnational Repression**

According to a March Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty report, Turkish authorities increasingly cooperated with Central Asian counterparts to detain, deport, and bar human rights defenders, political activists, and journalists from seeking refuge in Türkiye. In February, two Tajik political activists living in Türkiye were reportedly forcibly disappeared, raising concerns they were abducted and forcibly returned to Tajikistan. In February, Freedom House listed Türkiye and Tajikistan among the top five most prolific perpetrators of transnational repression based on data from the prior decade.

The University of Southern California Human Rights Advocacy Group and the Vienna-based advocacy group Freedom for Eurasia called Türkiye “an

increasingly unsafe environment” for Turkmen political activists and rights defenders, stating they faced “surveillance, travel restrictions, discrimination, and other abuses that Ashgabat and Ankara had increasingly used to control and monitor” both them and their relatives. They noted Turkish police had “reportedly compiled a list of 25 Turkmen migrants subject to deportation, as directed by the Turkmen Consulate in Istanbul.”