



HUMAN RIGHTS IN TURKEY:

2020 In Review



About Stockholm Center for Freedom

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

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

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

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

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** Subject matters are listed in alphabetical order*

1. Introduction

This report highlights the most important developments in the area of human rights in Turkey during the year 2020. Rising pressure on the Kurdish political movement, the crackdown on the Gülen movement, the arrest of journalists and deteriorating press freedom, the spread of hate speech and hate crimes targeting ethnic and religious minorities and refugees, systematic torture and ill-treatment and an increase in rights violations against women were the defining topics of the year.

Turkey has been experiencing a deepening human rights crisis over the past seven years. With the aim of consolidating his one-man rule, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been systematically undermining the fundamental pillars of Turkey's already imperfect democracy. These include amendments to the constitution that increased the power of the Turkish presidency and fundamentally eroded checks and balances on the executive, erosion of the rule of law, and increased executive control over the judiciary.

Political and civil rights in Turkey have deteriorated so severely under President Erdoğan that according to [Freedom House](#) Turkey is no longer a free country and scores the lowest among NATO members. Turkey's country score is in fact lower than such countries as Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh and Haiti, which are categorized as "partly free."

In its [2020 Report on Turkey](#) European Commission, executive branch of the European Union, said serious backsliding in the respect for democratic standards, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms continued in Turkey in the absence of an effective checks and balances mechanism.

According to human rights watchdogs, Turkish courts systematically accept bogus indictments, detain and convict without compelling evidence of criminal activity individuals and groups the Erdoğan government regards as political opponents. Among these are journalists, opposition politicians, activists and human rights defenders.

Erdoğan government has been involved in human rights violations beyond its own territory as well. In a [statement](#) in September, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet warned that the human rights situation in parts of northern Syria under the control of Turkish forces and Turkish-affiliated armed groups as "grim, with violence and criminality rife."

2. Crackdown on the Gülen movement

According to [Human Rights Watch](#), the largest group targeted by Erdoğan is people alleged to have links with the Gülen movement, a worldwide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas and activism of Fethullah Gülen, a US-based Muslim cleric. The bases of the movement are diverse service projects that are initiated, funded and conducted by people who are motivated by Gülen's humanitarian discourse. Ranging from private schools to poverty aid programs, these projects are independent of each other in operational terms, so the movement has no hierarchical structure.

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

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

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

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

Following the failed coup, the Turkish government carried out a massive purge of state institutions under the pretext of an anti-coup fight. Over 130,000 public servants, including 4,156 judges and prosecutors, as well as 20,610 members of the armed forces were summarily removed from their jobs for alleged membership in or relationships with "terrorist organizations" by emergency decree-laws subject to neither judicial nor parliamentary scrutiny.

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

According to a [statement](#) from the Turkish interior minister, a total of 292,000 people have been detained while 96,000 others have been jailed due to alleged links to the Gülen movement since the failed coup.

In an [opinion](#) published in September, the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) said widespread or systematic imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty in violation of the rules of international law of individuals with alleged links to the Gülen movement may constitute crimes against humanity.

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

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 concerning Erdoğan's crackdown on the Gülen movement:

Discrimination and hate speech

Erdoğan said Gülen movement supporters have no property rights



Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said at a press conference in December that supporters of the Gülen movement have no right to own property. [More..](#)

Erdoğan's comments reflected the policies implemented by Turkish government agencies since he started targeting the movement in 2013. In October, Nordic Monitor revealed a circular that showed how Turkey's Land Registry and Cadastre Directorate General bypassed the judiciary to seize the assets of alleged members of the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

In June Turkey's Culture and Tourism Ministry seized the house of an 87-year-old woman in the western province of Manisa because she donated it to a foundation linked to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

Academic said Gülen movement followers should be sent to rehabilitation camps

Communications professor Muttalip Kutluk Özgüven said in a June interview on the pro-government Akit TV that members of the Gülen movement should be sent to rehabilitation camps and subjected to psychological treatment.

“This fight cannot be carried out only with law enforcement measures. We need to establish rehabilitation camps,” said Özgüven. “Their bodies do not belong to them. They have to serve Turkey’s interests.” [More..](#)

Special needs school forced disabled girl to leave due to father’s links to Gülen movement

A young girl with major disabilities was forced to leave a public special needs school because her father used to work for an institution that was shut down by a government decree for its affiliation with the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

In a similar development, financial assistance paid by the Turkish government to the family of Nurbanu Aydın, a 29-year-old “spastic quadriplegia cerebral palsy” patient, was cut off after her father, Muammer Aydın, was arrested on terrorism charges over his links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)



Nur Banu Aydın

Purged public servants continued to face discrimination

Turkish banks continued to deny basic services to civil servants summarily fired by the Turkish government in the aftermath of an abortive putsch in July 2016. Levent Mazılıgüney, a dismissed public servant, said his credit card application to VakıfBank was denied despite the fact that he is a registered lawyer and his credit score is 1,860 out of 1,900. [More..](#)

Purged public servants and members of the armed forces continued to be subjected to various kinds of discrimination throughout the year. A dismissed civil servant was deemed ineligible by Turkey’s Ministry of Treasury and Finance to benefit from a real estate tax break granted to people who have no income. [More..](#)

Nebi Toylak, a former public school teacher summarily fired by the Turkish government in the aftermath of an abortive putsch in July 2016, was not allowed to attend a vocational course organized by the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) because he was a dismissed public servant. [More..](#)

A former public servant identified only by the initials A.B., 28, said he was not awarded his certificate by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services despite scoring the second highest in a nationwide certification examination because he was dismissed from his previous job by a government decree. [More..](#)

OHAL Commission continued to draw criticism

The State of Emergency Procedures Investigation Commission (OHAL Commission), had made decisions on 112,310 of a total of 126,630 applications as of December 31, 2020. It ruled in favor of the applicants in only 13,170 of the cases.

The commission was established as an appeals body under pressure from the Council of Europe in order to relieve the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of a huge workload emanating from tens of thousands of Turkish applicants who were unable to take their cases to Turkish courts. According to critics, the commission's role is simply to delay or prevent possible ECtHR decisions against Turkey. The commission is also accused of bias as it is led by former Justice Ministry deputy undersecretary Selahaddin Menteş, who had been openly supportive of President Erdoğan.

In its Turkey 2020 [report](#), the European Commission (EC) raised serious concerns about the ability of the commission to provide an effective remedy to dismissals. The report criticized the lengthy review procedures and underlined that the applicants did not have a proper means of defense as the commission does not hold hearings. The EC also said the commission did not have sufficiently individualized criteria to evaluate the applications.

Individuals with disabilities convicted on terror charges for alleged links to Gülen movement



Fatma Cömert

A young woman was sentenced to six years, three months' imprisonment in November for alleged membership in a terrorist organization, despite the paralysis of her hands and feet from birth. Fatma Cömert was diagnosed as almost totally disabled and lived her entire life in a wheelchair, unable to leave her home without assistance. However, she has been struggling with court cases for the last 18 months, and if the Supreme Court of Appeals upholds her sentence she will be arrested. [More..](#)



Bilal Konakçı

Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals upheld a conviction and sentence on the charge of membership in a terrorist organization handed down to Bilal Konakçı, a bomb disposal expert with the police who lost his hand and was blinded in an explosion. He was sentenced to seven years, six months by a local court. [More..](#)

Torture and inhuman treatment

Content of censored Council of Europe torture report revealed horrific details of post-coup crackdown

Brutally tortured, robbed of his property and livelihood, imprisoned and his family stigmatized, Col. Cemil Turhan and his story represent the epitome of suffering caused by human rights abuses committed on a massive scale in post-coup Turkey.

He was one of the victims who gave a statement to visiting members of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), a Council of Europe-affiliated body. Turkey blocked the publication of the report. [More..](#)

Female students strip-searched, denied right to consult lawyer

Female students detained by Turkish police over alleged links to the Gülen movement were subjected to a strip-search and interrogated without a lawyer present. [More..](#)

Turkey dropped investigation into demise of teacher who was tortured to death

The İstanbul chief public prosecutor has decided to drop an investigation into the death of Gökhan Açikkollu, a teacher who died after enduring 13 days of torture and abuse in police custody in İstanbul. [More..](#)



Gökhan Açikkollu

Couple subjected to electroshock, beatings, inhumane treatment at Turkish detention center

Müberra and Murat Boşcu, who were detained on October 17, 2016, were subjected to torture including electroshocks, beatings and strip-searches as well as inhumane treatment during their 14-day detention, according to Müberra Boşcu. [More..](#)

Torturers threatened me with sexually assaulting my daughter, former teacher said

Police officers threatened me with sexually assaulting my daughter, who was brought with my wife for interrogation, said Mehmet Eren when talking about the brutal torture and inhuman treatment he was subjected to at the Afyon Police Department. [More..](#)

Police chief nicknamed ‘Angel of Death’ who ran torture sites in Turkey unmasked in court testimony

A Turkish police chief with the self-proclaimed nickname of Azrael, or the Angel of Death, oversaw two unofficial torture sites with nearly 2,000 people subjected to brutal treatment in 2016, multiple victim statements in court revealed. [More..](#)

Female officer raped in detention by Turkish police had to abort pregnancy

A female officer who had served in the Turkish army had to have an abortion after she was raped in police custody, Lt. Abdulvahap Berke told a panel of judges in an Ankara court. [More..](#)

I heard screams of women being raped at a Turkish detention center, said torture victim

Erhan Doğan, who was tortured at a gymnasium-turned-detention center in Turkey, recounted for the first time the torture he underwent and witnessed. “The police who tortured me threatened to bring my daughter and my wife and rape them if I did not say what they wanted. I no longer cared about the torture I underwent that night,” Doğan said.

“It took about 45 minutes. Then they took me away, but the torture of the women in the next room continued. Judging from their cries and screams, I am absolutely sure they were raped.” [More..](#)

Doctor who witnessed torture in Turkish mass detention center spoke out

A medical doctor who was assigned to conduct physical examinations in a gymnasium-turned-mass detention center following a failed coup in Turkey in 2016 spoke for the first time about the torture he witnessed and recorded there to the Bold Medya news website in an interview with exiled journalist Cevheri Güven. [More..](#)

Erdoğan's long arm and the global witch hunt

Turkish diplomatic missions spied on individuals affiliated with the Gülen movement

Court documents revealed that Turkish diplomatic missions around the world systematically spied on individuals allegedly linked to the Gülen movement. According to a [report](#) by Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail, 15 Canadian citizens – including academics, journalists, real estate agents and a part-time taxi driver – were named as suspects in a Turkish “terrorism” investigation for supposed criminal activities such as writing or promoting articles supportive of Fethullah Gülen or downloading the [ByLock](#) messaging app.



Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [confirmed](#) systematic spying on Turkish government critics on foreign soil by Turkish diplomatic missions in February 2020. Çavuşoğlu said Turkish diplomats assigned to embassies and consulates have officially been instructed by the government to conduct such activities abroad. “If you look at the definition of a diplomat, it is clear. ... Intelligence gathering is the duty of diplomats,” Çavuşoğlu told Turkish journalists on February 16, 2020 following the Munich Security Conference, adding, “Intelligence gathering and information collection are a fact.”

According to court documents, alleged supporters of the Gülen movement were spied on by the Turkish diplomatic missions in the [United States](#), [Switzerland](#), [Australia](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Norway](#), [Georgia](#), [Sweden](#), [North Macedonia](#), [New Zealand](#), [South Korea](#) and the [United Kingdom](#).

Turkey signed secret agreements to abduct dissidents from foreign countries: UN letter

The Turkish government signed bilateral security cooperation agreements with multiple states that were phrased ambiguously to allow for the expulsion or abduction of Turkish nationals living abroad, a joint UN letter underlined. [More..](#)

Widespread or systematic imprisonment of individuals with alleged links to Gülen movement may constitute crimes against humanity: United Nations



Komiş Family

Widespread or systematic imprisonment of individuals with alleged links to the Gülen movement may constitute crimes against humanity, said the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), in an opinion on the summary extradition of Arif Komiş, 44, Ülkü Komiş, 38, and their four children from Malaysia to Turkey in August 2019. [More..](#)

In a similar case, WGAD concluded that the arrest, detention and forced

transfer to Turkey of six Turkish teachers by Kosovar and Turkish state agents in Kosovo on March 29, 2018 was arbitrary and in violation of international human rights norms and standards. [More..](#)

Turkish intelligence agency MIT's secret rendition flight and black torture site exposed

Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) operated a secret rendition flight and initiated a torture session on the spy plane when it abducted a critic of President Erdoğan from Kazakhstan and later subjected the victim to further torture and abuse at a black site near the airport in Ankara, court documents revealed. [More..](#)

Ongoing purge

In Turkey, under normal conditions, the Law on Public Servants requires that disciplinary actions, including dismissal from public service, be recommended by a committee after hearing the employee's defense. The decision must then be approved by a higher body within the relevant institution and can be challenged in the administrative court system.

But during the state of emergency, public servants were not even informed of accusations against them and were never asked to submit their defenses. Following the end of the state of emergency, a similar regime was created with a temporary law that would be in effect for 36 months, until July 2021. According to this [law](#), officials suspected of membership in or affiliation with entities deemed a threat to national security can be dismissed by the ministers upon the proposal of a disciplinary commission. Since the decisions are not published in the Official Gazette, the full number of summary dismissals during the year is unknown.

20,571 military personnel summarily dismissed from Turkish Armed Forces over alleged Gülen links



A total of 20,571 military personnel have been summarily dismissed from the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) since a coup attempt on July 15, 2016 due to their alleged links to the Gülen movement, said Maj. Pınar Kara, press and public relations officer at Turkey's Defense Ministry, at a press conference in November. [More..](#)

601 military personnel faced dismissal by administrative procedure despite non-prosecution on terrorism charges

Operations against TSK personnel continued throughout the year. In October, the state-run Anadolu news agency [reported](#) that the İzmir Chief Public Prosecutor's Office sent the files on 601 military personnel who can't be prosecuted on terrorism charges due to a lack of evidence to the relevant military commands in order to start the administrative process for their dismissal. [More..](#)

New 'research center' a dead end for purged diplomats reinstated by the courts

Career diplomats who were purged from the Foreign Ministry by the Turkish government and subsequently reinstated by the courts will be employed at a research center if the foreign minister declines to reappoint them to their former positions, according to a [regulation](#) published in Turkey's Official Gazette in July. The law does not provide any objective criteria as to when a diplomat can be fully reinstated, in essence giving the minister the authority to not fully implement the court decisions. [More..](#)

Turkey issued detention warrants for 60 lawyers following Erdoğan's call to suspend attorneys accused of terrorist links

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in September issued detention warrants for 60 lawyers on terror charges over their alleged affiliation with the Gülen movement, following a call by President Erdoğan for the suspension of lawyers accused of terrorist links. [More..](#)

The detentions attracted widespread international criticism. [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), Rapporteurs from the [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) (PACE), six [European law associations](#) and the [International Commission of Jurists](#) (ICJ) issued statements condemning the move.



Children of the purge: death, disease and separation

Turkey's post-coup purge made no exception for children

Turkey's post-coup purge continued to take a huge toll on human life, making no exceptions for children. Mehmet Fatih, Selman, Eymen and Ali İhsan all developed cancer after their fathers were arrested. Mehmet Akif's leukemia, from which he had recovered, reappeared when his father was arrested. Receiving dialysis three times a week, Azra Nur's condition is getting worse by the day. There are also those who were unable to cling to life and succumbed to their illnesses. [More..](#)

Death of 8-year-old Ahmet Burhan Ataç revealed plight of children caught up in Turkey's massive purge

The terrible ordeal of an 8-year-old boy who lost his life to cancer while his father was jailed and his mother tried on fabricated charges illustrates the gravity and extent of blatant violations of fundamental human rights in Turkey.

Ahmet Burhan Ataç, having fought hard to cling to life, finally succumbed to the cancer in the early hours of Thursday, May 7, at Balcalı Hospital in Adana, where he had been taken the evening before. [More..](#)

Another child succumbed to cancer without saying goodbye to his jailed father



Seven-year-old Selman Çalışkan succumbed to brain cancer in September without being able to see his father, a teacher jailed on bogus terrorism charges, one last time. Selman was diagnosed with brain cancer a year ago. He underwent surgery in June 2019 to remove a five-centimeter tumor and was partially paralyzed after the operation. His father, Rasim Çalışkan, was only allowed to visit his son twice during his

illness, once following the surgery and once when Selman's condition deteriorated. Çalışkan filed numerous requests to delay his sentence or to serve the remainder under house arrest, but his petitions were all rejected. [More..](#)

In July six-year-old Mehmet Erdoğan, whose father is in prison for alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in an Ankara hospital without being able to see his father one last time. Mehmet had undergone surgery for the removal of a cyst in his arm and died unexpectedly due to complications caused by the general anesthesia. A public prosecutor did not allow him to visit his son before the surgery. [More..](#)

Girl with Down syndrome left with teenage sister after parents detained for helping refugees

A seven-year-old girl with Down syndrome was left to the care of her teenage sister after her parents, Dudu Karataş (42) and Gökay Karataş (48), were detained on September 8 for helping refugees. The couple was taken into custody for helping Afghan refugees; however, during their interrogation they were asked if they were aiding members of the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

Death

Photographs of deputy police inspector who died in prison quarantine show criminal neglect



Photos of former deputy police inspector Mustafa Kabakçioğlu, 44, who died in a quarantine cell in prison on August 29, were revealed, shedding light on the unsanitary conditions in which he was forced to live.

In the photographs Kabakçioğlu's lifeless body is seen in a chair in a sitting position, his head drooping back and his nails turned blue. The conditions of his prison cell were also photographed,

revealing damp and filthy quarters and dirt on his T-shirt. It was obvious he used the trash bin as a dinner table and did not eat his last meal, seen in the photos untouched on top of the bin. [More..](#)

Turkish purge victim, rights activist lost battle against cancer

Haluk Savaş, 54, a leading human rights activist and a victim of a large-scale post-coup purge in Turkey, lost his battle against cancer in June. Savaş was a psychiatry professor at Gaziantep University until he was fired by a government decree in 2016 following a coup attempt. He was later arrested over alleged links to the Gülen movement.

In November 2016 he was released pending trial due to a cancer diagnosis, and after one year of treatment he was cured. However, the cancer returned in early 2019. For months he struggled to obtain a passport, despite later being acquitted by a court, to travel abroad in search of a treatment for the cancer. [More..](#)

Decorated officer not released by court despite health report died in prison

Mustafa Barış Avıalan, a former staff colonel sentenced to life imprisonment on coup charges, died in prison after a court denied his release despite health reports stating that his sentence needed to be postponed for six months. [More..](#)

Air force cadet sentenced to life in prison succumbed to bone cancer

Yusuf Kurt, 25, a former air force cadet sentenced to life in prison on coup charges succumbed to bone cancer in November in Eskişehir. Kurt was among 70 air force cadets sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of attempting to destroy the constitutional order by means of a coup attempt in July 2016. [More..](#)

Other victims of the Turkish government's relentless crackdown on the Gülen movement who passed away in 2020 include:

[Gülhan Çolakoğlu](#), 45, a cancer patient who was unable to receive treatment abroad after Turkish authorities refused to issue her a passport;

[Medeni Arifoğlu](#), a Turkish businessman who was jailed over alleged links to the Gülen movement, succumbed to cancer after he was belatedly released from prison despite his deteriorating health;

[Ömer Günerigök](#), 31, a teacher who was purged from his job and prosecuted by the authorities over Gülen links, succumbed to cancer;

[Caner Durukan](#), 42, a Turkish healthcare worker dismissed from his job in the post-coup purge, died of cancer;

[Ümit Gökhasan](#), a former police superintendent who was not released from prison until his cancer had spread to other parts of his body;

[Sevdegül Güler](#), a bedridden woman whose mother was denied a care allowance by Turkey's Ministry of Family and Social Policies due to her alleged affiliation with the Gülen movement;

[Cengiz Karakurt](#), 41, a teacher arrested for alleged membership in the Gülen movement, declared brain dead after passing out in his prison cell;

[Yusuf Uzun](#), 36, a teacher dismissed from his job during the post-coup purge, lost his battle with cancer after his belated release from prison;

[Ahmet Kaplan](#), 48, a purged police officer suffering from stage-four lung cancer who died alone in a prison infirmary; and

[Hüseyin Özen](#), 59, an inmate imprisoned for alleged ties to the Gülen movement who passed away due to COVID-19.

Enforced disappearances



A year into his disappearance, authorities kept quiet about the fate of Yusuf Bilge Tunç

Turkish authorities continued to maintain their silence about the fate of Yusuf Bilge Tunç, who went missing in broad daylight on August 6, 2019, leaving no trace behind. He has not been heard from since. All the efforts of his family and human rights defenders to find out what happened to him have proven to be of no avail. [More..](#)

Another man testified about torture by security officers during enforced disappearance

Yasin Ugan, who had been missing for six months before suddenly reappearing in police custody, revealed in court that he was tortured by security officers. Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a rights activist and a member of parliament, said Ugan had been tortured for six months after being kidnapped on February 13, 2019, with his head covered with a black plastic bag most of the time.

Ugan also said he was only allowed to take three showers during the time he was missing, Gergerlioğlu said. Ugan, a former civil servant fired from his job by the government in the aftermath of a 2016 coup attempt, appeared in court on in June over his alleged membership in the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

Arrest of pregnant women and mothers with infants

Turkish courts continued to arrest pregnant women despite regulations

Three pregnant women were arrested in June in Ankara and Manisa on terrorism-related charges on the grounds that they were members of the faith-based Gülen movement, a dissident group that has long been targeted by the government of President Erdoğan. [More..](#)

Zeynep Doğan (33), who was seven months pregnant, and her husband Ahmet Doğan (39) were detained in October and were forced to leave their three children under the age of nine behind. [More..](#)



Turkish authorities continued to detain and arrest mothers with babies

Suna Aras, the mother of a 9-month-old baby, was sent to prison in October in contravention of the law on the execution of sentences that requires the postponement of the execution of prison sentences for women who are pregnant or have given birth within the last year and a half. [More..](#)

In June, Yasemin Çetinkaya, a mother of two, was infected with COVID-19 while in detention in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır, one of a growing number of Turkish women either pregnant or with young children who are detained or arrested in contravention of the law on the execution of sentences. [More..](#)

Sultan and İbrahim Ataş, the parents of a 14-month-old-toddler and a 3-year-old girl, were arrested in September despite legal provisions that require postponement of the execution of prison sentences for women who are pregnant or have given birth within the last year and a half. [More..](#)

In December Betül Uluşam, 34, was detained at the hospital where she had given birth less than 24 hours after the delivery for alleged affiliation with the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

Pregnant woman subjected to sexual harassment and insults by prosecutor during interrogation

Nigar Kocabaş, a pregnant woman who in 2016 was interrogated by Chief Public Prosecutor İbrahim Keskin in the northern Turkish city of Samsun for affiliation with the Gülen movement, claimed she was verbally sexually harassed by the prosecutor. [More..](#)

Ailing prisoners denied proper care

Gov't releases critically ill prisoners only when they realize they'll die soon

Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a prominent human rights activist and an MP from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), has depicted the deaths of critically ill prisoners in Turkey who are not released in time to receive proper medical treatment as acts of "murder" committed by the state. "They refuse to release the prisoners until it gets to the point of no return. They only release the prisoners when they realize they will die soon, not wanting them to die in prison," he said. [More..](#)

Cancer patient was refused postponement of sentence, sent back to prison after major surgery



Ümit Gökhasan, a cancer patient imprisoned on alleged links to the Gülen movement, whose stomach and half of his esophagus were removed in an operation, was sent back to prison after a medical report found that he could survive in prison and that there was no need to postpone his sentence. [More..](#)

Turkey's top court denied release of former colonel suffering from advanced stage MS

Mustafa Özcan Çay, a former staff colonel convicted on coup charges, was denied release from prison by Turkey's Constitutional Court despite his inability to perform even the most basic tasks such as eating, drinking and using the bathroom without assistance due to advanced stage multiple sclerosis (MS). [More..](#)

Turkey's Constitutional Court denied release request of inmate with brain tumors

Turkey's top court in September denied the request for release of Lütfi Koç, 46, who was imprisoned on links to the Gülen movement, despite suffering from two brain tumors and a hernia. [More..](#)

Son of jailed prosecutor suffering from brain tumor pleaded for father's release

The son of Sadrettin Sarıkaya, a former specially authorized prosecutor who was arrested on charges of membership in the Gülen movement in 2017, pleaded for the release of his father, who remains in prison despite suffering from a brain tumor and other health problems. [More..](#)

3. The Year in Review: Crackdown on the Kurdish Political Movement



Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ

The Turkish government continued its efforts to criminalize the Kurdish political movement with a view to weakening the HDP, Turkey's third largest political party according to the results of the 2018 general election.

The party's charismatic former leader Selahattin Demirtaş remained behind bars on politically motivated charges despite rulings by Turkey's Constitutional Court and the ECtHR.

According to Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, over the last four years the Turkish government distorted and perverted the legal process to serve the political aim of keeping opposition politicians Selahattin Demirtaş, Figen Yüksekdağ and other former HDP deputies locked up.

According to the Ministry of Interior, Ankara has ousted a total of 151 elected mayors from office on accusations of terrorism in the last six years, almost all from the HDP, replacing them with government-appointed bureaucrats. Speaking during a session of the Turkish Parliament's Planning and Budget Committee in Ankara, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said during the last two mayoral terms — 2014-2019 and 2019

onwards — 73 of the 151 mayors removed from office were sentenced to a total of 778 years in prison.

State-appointed trustees now administer nearly all towns and cities in southeastern Turkey.

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 about the ongoing crackdown on the Kurdish political movement:

European Court of Human Rights called for immediate release of Kurdish leader Demirtaş, Erdoğan remained defiant

Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled in June that the lengthy imprisonment of former HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş, who has been behind bars on politically motivated charges since November 2016, [violated his rights](#), but he remained in prison due to a separate case.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on December 22 [called for the immediate release](#) of Demirtaş, finding Turkey guilty of violating his rights on five accounts. The Grand Chamber said his pre-trial detention since November 2016 had sent “a dangerous message to the entire population” that sharply narrowed free democratic debate.

Yet, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sounded defiant. Speaking to his ruling party lawmakers, Erdoğan slammed the ECtHR for “defending a terrorist” who was responsible for dozens of deaths during violent protests five years ago. [More..](#)

Using genocidal language, Erdoğan ally defined Turkey's pro-Kurdish party as ‘poisonous vermin,’ called for its closure

Using genocidal language, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and a key ally of President Erdoğan, defined the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) as “poisonous vermin” in December and called for its closure on ground of separatism. [More..](#)

Kurdish politician ousted from parliament sentenced to 22 years in prison

A high criminal court in southeastern Turkey has handed down a jail sentence of 22 years, three months on terrorism charges to Leyla Güven, who was ousted from the Turkish Parliament in June. Güven stood trial due to her statements critical of a Turkish military operation in the Afrin region of Syria. [More..](#)

Turkey has removed 151 mayors on ‘terror charges’ since 2014: Interior Ministry

Ankara has ousted 151 mayors from office on accusations of terrorism in the last six years, replacing them with government-appointed bureaucrats, according to Turkey’s Interior Ministry.

Almost all the ousted mayors are from the HDP, which Ankara accuses of ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), an armed secessionist Kurdish group designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey. [More..](#)

Ankara ordered detention of 82 Kurdish politicians over protests against alleged Turkish support for ISIL

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office ordered the detention of 82 prominent pro-Kurdish politicians in September. The detention warrants were issued over the politicians’ alleged role in protests in Kurdish majority cities against what is seen by many as the Turkish government’s tacit approval of the Kobane siege in 2014, when Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants laid a prolonged siege to a Kurdish town in northern Syria. [More..](#)

Ousted Kurdish mayor attacked by police dogs, tortured in home for hours

Ousted co-mayor of Van’s Edremit Municipality Rojbin Çetin was attacked by police dogs and tortured in her home in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır during a police raid on June 26, deputy chair of the HDP parliamentary group Meral Daniş Beştaş said at a press conference. [More..](#)



Rojbin Çetin



Sebahat Tuncel

Kurdish politician sentenced to prison for calling President Erdoğan a misogynist

Sebahat Tuncel, a former Kurdish parliamentarian jailed in on terrorism charges, has been handed down an additional prison sentence for insulting President Tayyip Erdoğan. Tuncel was protesting the appointment of a trustee to replace a mayor in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır and the arrest of Co-mayors Gülten Kışanak and Fırat Anlı in October 2016. [More..](#)

Pro-Kurdish party discovered wiretapping devices in İstanbul headquarters

Saruhan Oluç, deputy chairman of the HDP parliamentary group, said at a press conference in December that four listening devices were found in the HDP's İstanbul headquarters. [More..](#)

Pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party members subjected to police violence during house raid

Meryem Aşkara, a member of the HDP, claimed she was beaten and threatened by special forces police who raided her house in southeastern Şırnak province. [More..](#)

Diyarbakır provincial co-chairs of pro-Kurdish HDP arrested

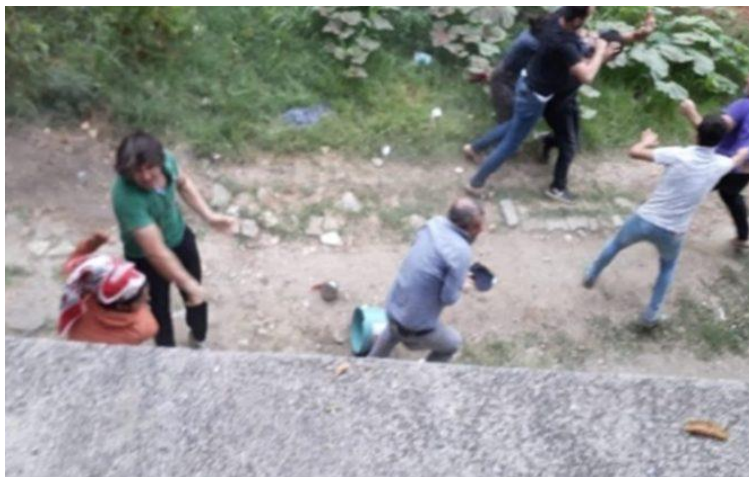
Zeyyat Ceylan and Hülya Alökmen Uyanık, the Diyarbakır provincial co-chairs of the HDP, were arrested in October on the charge of membership in an armed terrorist organization. [More..](#)

4. The Year in Review: Minority and Refugee Rights

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his key ally, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Devlet Bahçeli, continued to use a divisive ultranationalist rhetoric throughout the year. The ongoing economic turmoil, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, also contributed to the rise of rights violations, hate speech and hate crimes targeting ethnic and religious minorities and refugees in Turkey in 2020. The country's Kurdish, Armenian and Alevi communities and other minorities faced discrimination and hate speech to varying degrees.

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 in the field of minority and refugee rights:

Hate crimes against Kurds increased in Turkey



Sixteen Kurdish seasonal farm laborers were attacked on September 4 by a farm owner and a group of villagers in Turkey's northwestern province of Sakarya in an incident that appears to have been caused by anti-Kurdish sentiment. The laborers came from the southeastern city of Mardin during the summer holidays to work in the

hazelnut orchards. They were picking hazelnuts when the owner of the farm verbally and physically assaulted them. Images of the attack were widely circulated on social media. [More..](#)

In [another hate crime](#) father and son Kadir Sakçı (43) and Burhan Sakçı (16) were attacked by a mob, again in Sakarya, for speaking to each other in Kurdish. Kadir Sakçı died as a result of his injuries and Burhan was hospitalized for an extended period of time.



Armenian graves desecrated amid climate of hostility towards minority groups in Turkey

Some of the graves in the Armenian cemetery of either the Surp Pırgiç or Karasun Manug church foundation in the Sincan district of Ankara were desecrated amid a growing climate of hostility and repression towards minority groups in Turkey. [More..](#)

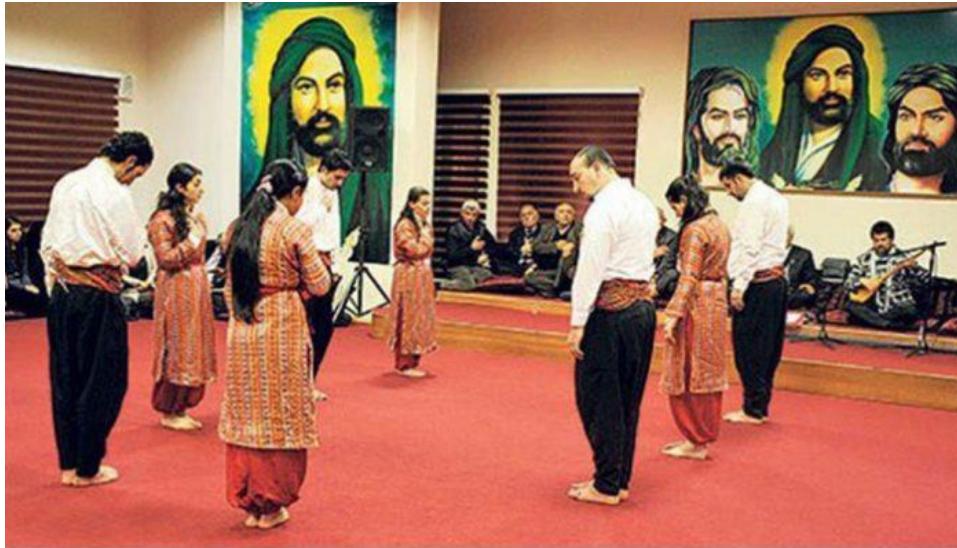
Hate crimes against Syrian refugees on the rise

Syrian refugee Abdulkadir Davud, 21, was [shot dead](#) on August 18 in what appears to have been a hate crime in the Zeytinburnu district of İstanbul.

On September 13, 16-year-old Syrian Eymen Hammami was [stabbed to death](#) in another alleged hate crime in the Black Sea city of Samsun.

Also in September, Vail El Mansur, a 14-year-old Syrian boy, was [killed](#) in an alleged hate crime in on his way to work in central Turkey's Konya province.

Three refugee women and a child were severely beaten in the middle of the street in the southeastern city of Antep in September by a Turkish man and woman. [More..](#)



Alevi communities increasingly faced hate crimes in Turkey

Death threats targeting Alevis were spray-painted on the walls of an apartment building in the Pendik district of İstanbul in October. “Death to Alevis” was written on one wall, with tenants expressing deep concern and anxiety over the threats. [More...](#)

Alevi leaders say the current situation of Turkey’s Alevi population is becoming increasingly precarious as the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has failed to fulfill its promise of granting them more rights to enable free practice of their beliefs and has increasingly imposed its own version of Islam on various segments of society. [More...](#)

70 percent of Kurdish youths face discrimination, research showed

Seventy percent of Kurdish youths in Turkey encounter discrimination in their daily lives, according to joint research conducted by the Rawest Research Center, the Yaşama Dair Vakıf (YADA Foundation) and the Kurdish Studies Center. [More...](#)

Turkey removed signs in Kurdish as racist attacks on Kurds surge

The trustee appointed by Ankara to replace the pro-Kurdish mayor of the eastern city of Van has substituted local placename signs in Kurdish with signs in Turkish. Prohibitions against the use of Kurdish in Turkey go back many years. Kurdish language, clothing, folklore and names had been banned since 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. [More..](#)

Kurdish private died under suspicious circumstances during military service

Osman Özçalımlı, a gendarmerie private recently assigned to a prison in the western city of İzmir, died under suspicious circumstances in August a day after he called his father and said, “I’m in bad shape. ... They insult me, they call me a traitor.” In its [report](#) the state-run Anadolu news agency merely said a private had died after “falling from a height.” Pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) deputy Züleyha Gülüm claimed that the suspicious deaths that take place in the military mostly involve Kurdish and Alevi soldiers. [More..](#)

Refugee children isolated in separate school after Turkish parents reject mixed education

The children of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees were grouped into a single school in the Central Anatolian city of Kırşehir after Turkish parents refused to send their children to the same school as refugees, claiming a “bad influence.” [More..](#)



Video showed African refugees being tortured by Turkish gang at Greek border

A group of African refugees were tortured at the Turkish-Greek border by a Turkish-speaking gang, according to video footage shared by an İstanbul-based refugee solidarity group on their Twitter [account](#) on October 10. [More..](#)

Child worker accounts revealed plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey

The personal accounts of children who work 12 hours a day for a fraction of the minimum wage while having to endure social exclusion and frequent insults reveal the plight of Syrian refugees in Turkey. [More..](#)

Turkey’s Armenian community still fears for its safety despite ceasefire in Karabakh

One hundred forty-two Armenians left Turkey in October amid rising anti-Armenian sentiment following Azerbaijani-Armenian clashes. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the southern Caucasus triggered a new wave of anti-Armenian sentiment in Turkey, exploited and fueled by ultranationalist elements, and has increased the pressure on its Armenian citizens. [More..](#)

Turkey's Armenian community still fears for its safety despite a ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, after ultranationalist elements, with the tacit approval of the Turkish government, used the clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia to fuel a new wave of anti-Armenian sentiment. [More..](#)

According to Yerevan-based Turkish-Armenian journalist Alin Ozinian, many Armenians still believe the [latest protests](#) were attempts to frustrate the community and were provocative acts aimed at repressing the Armenians and giving them a hard time.

Refugees in Turkey are pushed into ghettoization in absence of integration policies

The majority of Turkish society is resisting accommodating refugees, and migration policies are ineffective in integration, which is pushing refugees into ghettoization and causing social division, according to Professor Murat Erdoğan of the Turkish-German University Center for Migration and Integration. [More..](#)

American spouse of Turkish pastor to be deported for no apparent reason



Joy Anna Crow Subaşıgüller, a US citizen married to a Turkish Protestant pastor, was told to leave Turkey in 10 days back in June. The decision came after the application to renew her residence permit was denied by the Ministry of Interior's immigration office without the provision of any justification.

Head of the Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation Timur Topuz said Protestant clerics and their families were systematically denied residence permits and the existing permits were revoked. According to Topuz more than 100 Protestants, including their families, have experienced such problems. [More..](#)

Turkey's higher education board banned dissertations in Kurdish

Turkey's Higher Education Board (YÖK) has prohibited students studying Kurdish language and literature at Turkish universities from writing their dissertations in Kurdish. All dissertations at Kurdish language departments will now have to be written in Turkish. [More..](#)

5. Press freedom

The Turkish government continued to muzzle the press in 2020 in a variety of ways, including imprisoning journalists, eliminating media outlets, overseeing the purchase of media brands by pro-government conglomerates and using regulatory authorities to exert financial pressure.

Journalism is still associated with terrorism in Turkey, and journalistic work is used as evidence against journalists in the overwhelming majority of convictions. In most of the trials, the evidence is typically made up of social media posts, news stories, articles and TV broadcasts. According to the Stockholm Center for Freedom’s “[Jailed and Wanted Journalists in Turkey](#)” database, 175 journalists are behind bars and 167 are wanted and either in exile or at large. Media freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) describes Turkey as “the world’s biggest jailer of professional journalists.”

Yet, according to a [report](#) by the Center for American Progress (CAP), despite heavy censorship, two key trends undercut President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s efforts to control the media landscape: “rising distrust toward the media and increasing fragmentation in the ways that Turks get their news.”

Cognizant of these trends, the Turkish government passed a [Social Media Law](#), which came into force on October 1, that poses an immediate threat of extensive censorship of the Internet. This is particularly worrisome for — following the state-led takeover of the mainstream media — social media platforms as well as online news sites, which remain among the last bastions of critical journalism in Turkey.

Even before the new law went into effect, Turkish police [investigated](#) 14,186 social media accounts in the first seven months of 2020, taking legal action against 6,743 of them on charges of spreading terrorist propaganda, inciting the public to hatred and enmity, instilling fear in and causing panic among the public or containing provocative content.

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 in the field of press freedom:

Jailed journalists die of cancer after belated release from prison



Journalist Mevlüt Öztaş, who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer while in jail, [died in July](#) after his belated release from prison despite a medical report recommending it.

TV director Fatih Terzioğlu, 40, who was diagnosed with stomach cancer during his 21-month incarceration on terrorism charges, died in August following his release from prison in mid-July after an intensive social media campaign. [More..](#)

Turkish courts consider publishing leaked state documents an act of terrorism, sentence journalist Mehmet Baransu to a total of 36 years

A Mersin court that [handed down](#) a prison sentence of 19 years, six months to jailed investigative journalist Mehmet Baransu on three separate charges said in its reasoned decision that he had published classified information with “terror motives” and not for purposes of journalism.

Baransu was also sentenced to an additional 17 years by an İstanbul court in November for publishing leaked government documents. [More..](#)



European rights court rules Turkey violated rights of Turkish journalists

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) [ruled](#) that Turkey violated the right to liberty and security as well as the right to freedom of expression of journalist Ahmet Şık, who was kept in pre-trial detention for 14 months in Turkey.

The ECtHR made a similar ruling about a group of journalists and executives from the anti-government Cumhuriyet daily who stood trial on terrorism charges in the country. [More..](#)

Turkey fines social media giants for refusal to comply with controversial law

Turkey imposed a first round of fines, TL 30 million (\$3.8 million) each, on social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for failing to comply with a new law. On November 4, the companies were slapped with a second round of fines of TL 10 million (\$1.17 million) for the same reason. [More...](#)

News outlets critical of the government slapped with high and disproportionate fines

Turkey's broadcasting watchdog, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), imposed fines on TV stations critical of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) totaling 25 times the amount it imposed on pro-government TV stations in 2020. RTÜK had received 102,500 complaints about the staunchly pro-government ATV in 2020; however, ATV was punished only twice, once with an administrative fine for violating laws protecting the family, and again as a warning for the inappropriate use of Turkish, the mildest form of RTÜK sanctions. In addition, RTÜK failed to process any of the complaints filed against pro-government TV stations A Haber, Kanal 7, TV Net and TGRT News in 2020 and did not impose any fines on them. [More...](#)

Turkish writer Ahmet Altan held in prison for over 1,500 days without a shred of credible evidence



The Turkish government has held novelist and journalist Ahmet Altan in İstanbul's Silivri Prison for 1,500 days without a shred of credible evidence that he has committed any crime other than to express critical opinions, Emma Sinclair-Webb from Human Rights Watch [said](#).

Altan topped the December ranking of the One Free Press Coalition's "10 Most Urgent" list of press freedom cases, the organization announced in a press release. [More..](#)

Exiled journalist Can Dündar's assets seized, gets 27 years in prison

Exiled journalist Can Dündar was [handed down](#) a 27-year, six-month prison sentence in a trial concerning a news report on National Intelligence Organization (MIT) trucks transporting arms to rebels in Syria.

The Özgürüz website, which is run by Dündar, was [cut from access](#) in Turkey by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). A Turkish court also ruled to seized Dündar's assets and declared him a fugitive in October. [More...](#)

Appeals court upholds life sentences for 4 defendants including journalist Karaca, former MP İşbilen

A regional court of appeals in Ankara has ruled to uphold the aggravated life sentences of four defendants — journalist Hidayet Karaca, former lawmaker İlhan İşbilen, Fethullah Gülen's cousin Kazım Avcı and Alaeddin Kaya, former owner of the Zaman newspaper. [More...](#)



4 journalists arrested for reporting on Kurdish villagers allegedly thrown from military helicopter

Four journalists who reported on two Kurdish villagers who had allegedly been thrown out of a military helicopter were arrested in October. The villagers were in fact assaulted by a mob of more than 100 soldiers, a [report](#) by independent deputy and investigative journalist Ahmet Şık had later revealed. [More..](#)

Journalists convicted over reports on Turkish black op in Libya

A Turkish court in September convicted five journalists over their reports on a Turkish intelligence officer killed in Libya and sentenced them to more than three years in prison but released them pending appeal. [More..](#)

Exiled Turkish journalist attacked in Stockholm suburb

Sweden-based Turkish journalist Abdullah Bozkurt was attacked yesterday near his home in Stockholm, hospitalizing him for injuries sustained. Bozkurt and his team of journalists in Sweden run Nordic Monitor news web site which provides exclusive and critical coverage on Turkey and exposes the clandestine activities of the notorious Turkish intelligence agency. [More..](#)



İstanbul court upholds prison sentences of journalists from Turkey's pro-opposition Sözcü daily

The prison sentences of nine journalists from Turkey's pro-opposition Sözcü daily who were charged with supporting the Gülen movement have been upheld by the İstanbul Regional Appeals Court. [More..](#)



Journalist Büşra Erdal denied release despite eligibility for parole

Journalist Büşra Erdal has been denied release from prison although she has been eligible for parole since March 30, according to Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a prominent human rights activist and a deputy from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). [More..](#)

Turkish TV station closes down due to gov't pressure 26 days after launch

Private Turkish television station Olay TV closed down on December 25, only 26 days after it started broadcasting, due to intense pressure from Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. [More..](#)

Female journalists in Turkey face discrimination and harassment at work, says media association

Female journalists in Turkey face problems at work, ranging from unequal pay to sexual harassment, most frequently seen in local media outlets, according to a report by the Media Research Association (MEDAR). [More..](#)

Turkish gov't uses TRT as a weapon to spread its censorship to YouTube

After taking full control of traditional media, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began silencing dissenting voices on YouTube through Turkey's public broadcaster TRT, which abused the platform's community guidelines and copyright policy to secure the closure of dozens of channels and the removal of thousands of videos. [More..](#)

6. Torture and Inhuman Treatment

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

The enormous gulf between Turkey's constitutional provisions for the protection of human rights and the grim reality on the ground continued to grow during the year. In a landmark decision, Turkey's Constitutional Court in November [found](#) a government decree that granted immunity to civilians who were involved in criminal activities to suppress the abortive putsch to be constitutional, hence sanctioning the country's culture of impunity at the highest level.

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 in the field of torture and inhuman treatment:

Council of Europe's CPT confirmed continued ill-treatment and torture in Turkey

The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) confirmed in two [reports](#) published on August 5 the continued existence of ill-treatment, torture, informal questioning and restricted access to a lawyer as well as a fundamentally flawed medical screening system in Turkish detention facilities. [More..](#)

Female officer raped in detention by Turkish police had to abort pregnancy

A female officer who had served in the Turkish army had to have an abortion after she was raped in police custody, Lt. Abdulvahap Berke told a panel of judges in an Ankara court. [More..](#)

Police chief nicknamed 'Angel of Death' who ran torture sites in Turkey unmasked in court testimony

A Turkish police chief with the self-proclaimed nickname of Azrael, or the Angel of Death, oversaw two unofficial torture sites with nearly 2,000 people subjected to brutal treatment in 2016, multiple victim statements in court revealed. [More..](#)



Man testified about torture by security officers during enforced disappearance

Yasin Ugan, who had been missing for six months before suddenly reappearing in police custody, revealed in court that he was tortured by security officers, according to a prominent Turkish human rights activist.

Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a rights activist and a member of parliament, said Ugan had been tortured for six months after being kidnapped on February 13, 2019, with his head covered with a black plastic bag most of the time. [More..](#)

Ousted Kurdish mayor attacked by police dogs, tortured in home for hours

Ousted co-mayor of Van's Edremit Municipality Rojbin Çetin was attacked by police dogs and tortured in her home in the southeastern city of Diyarbakır during a police raid on June 26. [More..](#)

Content of censored Council of Europe torture report on Turkey revealed

Documents detailing torture and abuse in Turkish prisons and detention centers obtained by Nordic Monitor explain why Turkey has for four years blocked the publication of a report by a Council of Europe committee that paid a fact-finding visit to Turkey in 2016 to investigate allegations of torture and ill treatment in Turkish correctional facilities.

Brutally tortured, robbed of his property and livelihood, imprisoned and his family stigmatized, Col. Cemil Turhan and his story represent the epitome of suffering caused by human rights abuses committed on a massive scale in post-coup Turkey. He was

one of the victims who gave a statement to the visiting members of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), a Council of Europe-affiliated body. [More..](#)



Group of soldiers assaulted Kurdish villagers, one succumbs to his injuries

Servet Turgut and Osman Şiban, two Kurdish villagers [allegedly thrown from a military helicopter](#) in the southeastern province of Van, were in fact assaulted by a mob of more than 100 soldiers, a [report](#) by independent deputy and investigative journalist Ahmet Şık revealed. [More..](#)

I heard screams of women being raped at a Turkish detention center, said torture victim

Erhan Doğan, who was tortured at a gymnasium-turned-detention center in Turkey, recounted for the first time the torture he underwent and witnessed. “The police who tortured me threatened to bring my daughter and my wife and rape them if I did not say what they wanted. I no longer cared about the torture I underwent that night,” Doğan said.

“It took about 45 minutes. Then they took me away, but the torture of the women in the next room continued. Judging from their cries and screams, I am absolutely sure they were raped. [More..](#)



Photographs of deputy police inspector who died in prison quarantine show criminal neglect

Photos of former deputy police inspector Mustafa Kabakçioğlu, 44, who died in a quarantine cell in prison on August 29, have been revealed, shedding light on the unsanitary conditions in which he was forced to live. [More..](#)

Turkish prosecutor who approved torture chambers at unauthorized site identified

Torture chambers set up at an unofficial detention site in Turkey's capital city of Ankara that were the subject of a Council of Europe (CoE) report in 2016 censored by Turkey were approved with the directives of investigating prosecutor Mustafa Manga, judicial papers revealed. [More..](#)

Turkish-backed Syrian rebels may have carried out torture, rape and looting: UN

Turkey must rein in the rebels it supports in northern Syria who may have carried out kidnappings, torture, rape and looting of civilian property, United Nations war crimes investigators said in September. [More..](#)

Doctor who witnessed torture in Turkish mass detention center speaks out

A medical doctor who was assigned to conduct physical examinations in a gymnasium-turned-mass detention center following a failed coup in Turkey in 2016 spoke for the first time about the torture he witnessed and recorded there to the Bold Medya news website in an interview with exiled journalist Cevheri Güven. [More..](#)

Police officer accused of torturing former air forces commander gets promoted



Elif Uzun Sümercan, a former deputy chief of the Ankara Police Department's counterterrorism unit who was accused of torturing former commander of the Turkish Air Forces Gen. Akın Öztürk, has been rewarded by an appointment as a department head at Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. [More..](#)

Turkish intelligence agency MIT's secret rendition flight and black torture site exposed

Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, or MİT) operated a secret rendition flight and initiated a torture session on the spy plane when it abducted a critic of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from Kazakhstan and later subjected the victim to further torture and abuse at a black site near the airport in Ankara, court documents obtained by [Nordic Monitor](#) revealed. [More..](#)



Policeman accused of torture gets fined \$450, with payment deferred for 5 years

The Erzurum Court of Appeals ruled to impose a fine of TL 3,000 (approximately \$450, less than the fine for breaking curfew) on police officer O.Ş., who was accused of torturing four villagers but deferred the execution of its verdict. [More..](#)

7. Women's Rights

The year 2020 has witnessed an increase in rights violations against women in Turkey, with rising numbers of femicide cases amid discussions of withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty designed to prevent violence and domestic abuse against women.

According to women's organizations 269 women were [killed](#) by men this year and 152 women died under suspicious circumstances. Activists, academics, opposition politicians and journalists have criticized the government for not taking the necessary steps to prevent these deaths.

Another issue that caused an outcry in 2020 was the unlawful strip-search of political prisoners and their visitors. Many victims came [forward](#) on social media after human rights activist and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu brought the issue to parliament and started a campaign on social media.

Here is some of the most important news from 2020 in the field of women's rights:

At least 15,557 women murdered in Turkey since start of AKP rule

Violence against women has dramatically increased since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, and at least 15,557 women have been murdered in Turkey since then, [according](#) to a report prepared by human rights activist and main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy Sezgin Tanrikulu in March 2020. Read [More...](#)

Pregnant women and new mothers imprisoned



According to unofficial figures, there are more than 600 babies and young children [staying with their mothers](#) in prison. According to activists, imprisoning children with their mothers is against both human and children's rights. Turkish authorities continued arresting pregnant women and women with infants in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of these women were arrested on political charges, and some [suffered](#) from health problems. [More...](#)

Female officer raped in detention by Turkish police had to abort pregnancy

A female officer who had served in the Turkish army had to have an abortion after she was raped in police custody, Lt. Abdulvahap Berke told a panel of judges in an Ankara court.

Testifying under oath at the Ankara 17th High Criminal Court, Berke asked the panel of judges if they were aware of the terrible ordeal of a female officer who was raped by the police during detention in the aftermath of a failed coup on July 15, 2016, during which thousands of civilians and servicemen and women were detained without any effective administrative or judicial investigation and were subjected to abuse, torture and ill-treatment at unofficial detention sites. [More..](#)

Turkish women raise their voices against possible withdrawal from Istanbul Convention

Amid the fear of Turkey's possible withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty designed to prevent violence and domestic abuse against women, 155 Turkish women of letters published a joint statement on August 6 defending the convention, while women took to the streets across Turkey to protest the possible move. [More..](#)



30 female university students were strip-searched in detention prompting outcry

In September 30 female university students were detained by the Turkish police, subjected to an unlawful strip-search and interrogated without a lawyer present. The incident caused an outcry among activists. [More...](#)

Turkish Twitter users stand up against sexual harassment and humiliating strip searches in Turkish prisons

In the last months of the year scores of women came forward on social media and talked said they were subjected to unlawful strip-searches in Turkey's prisons. They talked about their experiences in videos shared on social media, following a denial of the practice by ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputy group chairperson Özlem Zengin. [More...](#)



Children of political prisoners mentally affected by government purge

This year families have said that their children were psychologically affected by the purge to the extent that some children were prescribed psychiatric medication after their parents' arrest. Parents said the conditions after the COVID-19 pandemic led to cancellations of prison visits. Children who were not able to see their parents for months developed anti-social behaviors. [More...](#)

Female migrants subjected to sexual harassment, rape and beatings at the border

Refugees entering Turkey via the Iranian border have been facing human rights violations ranging from rape and sexual harassment to physical abuse and deprivation of proper healthcare. According to news reports many refugee women were threatened into keeping silent about abuse and rape. Women who have been interviewed by lawyers have refused to file complaints because men in positions of authority have threatened to deport them if they do. [More...](#)