



## HUMAN RIGHTS IN TURKEY:

# 2021 In Review



## **About the Stockholm Center for Freedom**

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

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

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

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

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*\* Subject matters are listed in alphabetical order*

## 1. Introduction

Turkey has been experiencing a deepening human rights crisis over the past eight years. President Erdoğan's one-man-rule knows no limits regardless of the consequences for the country. With the aim of consolidating his power, President 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 presidency and fundamentally eroded checks and balances on the executive, erosion of the rule of law and increased executive control over the judiciary. In 2021 his government took further dangerous measures to undermine the rule of law and target perceived critics and political opponents.

Political and civil rights in the country have deteriorated so dramatically under President Erdoğan that according to [Freedom House](#) Turkey remains "not free" with a score of 32/100, in the same category as Russia, China and Iran. The rights group's [report](#) on global transnational repression also revealed how Turkey has become number one among countries that have conducted renditions from host states since 2014.

According to [2021 statistics](#) announced by Robert Spano, president of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Turkey ranks second after Russia, with 15,250 applications pending at the ECtHR, with two-thirds of them concerning alleged violations in arrests and trials related to a coup attempt on July 15, 2016. As in the previous year, Turkey ranked first among the 47 Council of Europe (CoE) member states in the number of judgments from the ECtHR concerning violations of freedom of expression in 2021.

In its [2021 Report](#) on Turkey the European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, said backsliding in the respect for democracy, human and fundamental rights and the Turkish judicial system continued. The Turkish parliament lacked the necessary means to hold the government accountable, and Turkey's constitutional architecture continued to centralize powers at the level of the presidency without ensuring a sound and effective separation of powers, the EU report stated.

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.

On March 20, 2021 President Erdoğan issued a [decree](#) suddenly withdrawing Turkey from the CoE's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, an international accord designed to protect women's rights and prevent domestic violence in societies, despite high statistics of violence targeting women in the country.

The move came two days after the chief prosecutor of Turkey's top appeals court announced he was opening a case to close down the opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), only hours after the Turkish parliament improperly expelled HDP deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a leading human rights advocate who has shone a light on controversial topics including torture and prison strip-searches.

## 2. Crackdown on the Gülen movement

The Gülen movement is a worldwide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas and activism of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric resident in the US. 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.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip 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. More than 130,000 public servants, including over 4,000 judges and prosecutors, as well as 29,444 members of the armed forces were summarily removed from their jobs for alleged membership in or relationships with "terrorist organizations" by emergency decree-laws subject to neither judicial nor parliamentary scrutiny.

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

According to a [statement](#) from the Turkish interior minister, a total of 319,587 people have been detained while 99,962 others have been jailed due to alleged links to the Gülen movement since the failed coup.

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 2021 concerning Erdoğan's crackdown on the Gülen movement:

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## ***Decisions and reports by international organizations and foreign governments***

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### **Vague terrorism charge used to target supporters of the Gülen movement: UN special rapporteurs**



The vague and imprecise charge of “membership in an armed terrorist organization” appears to be repeatedly misused to target critics of the Turkish government's policies and to criminalize the legitimate activities of supporters of the Gülen movement, said the vice chair of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) and three special rapporteurs in a letter to the Turkish government. [More..](#)

### **UN working group found detention of individuals with alleged Gülen links arbitrary in 2 separate cases**

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in two separate cases that the arrest and detention of individuals with alleged ties to the Gülen movement were arbitrary and urged the Turkish government to ensure a full and independent investigation of the circumstances surrounding their detention and to take appropriate measures against those responsible for the violation of their rights. [More..](#)

### **Closure of trade unions, dismissal of workers over Gülen links violated freedom to associate, right to organize, UN body said**

The International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN agency setting labor standards, decided in May that the Turkish government violated UN conventions on labor by closing down trade unions and dismissing workers over alleged affiliation with the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **European court ruled Turkey violated ex-police officer's rights over ByLock use**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in July faulted Turkey over the pre-trial detention of a former police officer due to his alleged use of the

ByLock mobile phone application, seen by Turkish authorities as a sign of terrorist organization membership. [More..](#)

Some 95,000 people were [arrested or convicted](#) on terrorism charges due to their alleged use of ByLock.



### **ECtHR condemned Turkey over post-coup arrests of judges and prosecutors**

The ECtHR in November ruled that Turkey had acted unlawfully by arresting more than 400 judges and prosecutors after a failed 2016 coup against President Erdoğan. [More..](#)

### **Praising Gülen movement before 2016 coup attempt not a crime, ECtHR said**

The ECtHR in December faulted Turkey for violating the right to freedom of expression of a former teacher, stating that public comments in favor of the Gülen movement made before a coup attempt in July 2016 do not constitute a crime. [More..](#)

### **Turkey detains, arrests people for Gülen links on basis of scant evidence: US report**

Turkish government continues to detain and arrest Turks over alleged links to the Gülen movement, “often on the basis of scant evidence and minimal due process,” the US Department of State said in the Turkey section of its “Country Reports on Terrorism 2020.” [More..](#)

### **US report highlighted Turkey’s crackdown on Gülen movement after coup attempt**

A report by the US State Department regarding a series of “significant human rights issues” in Turkey highlighted the crackdown launched by President Erdoğan’s government on the faith-based Gülen movement, which intensified following an attempted coup in 2016. [More..](#)



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## Ongoing purge

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### **319,587 people detained, 99,962 arrested in terrorism operations against the Gülen movement**

A total of 319,587 people have been detained and 99,962 arrested in operations against supporters of the Gülen movement since a coup attempt on July 15, 2016, Turkey's Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said in November. [More..](#)

### **29,444 military members dismissed as part of Turkey's post-coup purge**

A total of 29,444 military members have been dismissed from the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), gendarmerie and the coast guard in a post-coup purge that started after an abortive putsch in July 2016, the pro-government Sabah daily reported in May. [More..](#)

### **Report shed light on algorithm used to persecute alleged members of Gülen movement in Turkish Armed Forces**

More than 13,000 Turkish military personnel have been dismissed since July 2016 on the basis of an algorithm used by the authorities to assess the alleged "terrorist" credentials or connections of military officers and their relatives in violation of multiple human rights, a report published by the UK-based, non-profit Statewatch revealed in November. [More..](#)

### **More than 750 former cadets detained in Turkey as they turned 18**

More than 750 former military cadets were detained between January and October 2021 over their alleged links to the Gülen movement as they turned 18 years of age. [More..](#)



### **Then-and-now photos of dismissed public servants revealed extent of Turkey's purge**

Former public servants in May revealed on Twitter the extent of Turkey's post-coup purge by sharing "then-and-now photographs" of them in their new jobs as day laborers and blue-collar workers. [More..](#)

## **Anti-Gülenist witch-hunt reached new levels, with dozens arrested for 'spreading COVID-19 across Turkey'**

Police in May detained 84 members of the movement in operations across 14 provinces for allegedly spreading the coronavirus, providing financial support to the families of people who are behind bars on alleged Gülen links and suspicious communication with each other on the Internet and through online games. [More..](#)

## **Turkey's top judicial body disbarred 13 judges, prosecutors over Gülen links**

Turkey's Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) in October disbarred 10 prosecutors and three judges due to their alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

Adnan Şeker, a lawyer whose clients included US-based Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, was convicted in June of membership in a terrorist organization by an Ankara court and sentenced to nine years, nine months' imprisonment. [More..](#)

## **Story of teacher-turned-butcher revealed extent of Turkey's post-coup purge**

The story of Cafer Altıkardeş, a former geography teacher fired from his job by an emergency decree who lost half his index finger while working to survive as a butcher, revealed the extent of Turkey's post-coup purge. [More..](#)

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## ***Hate speech and discrimination***

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## **Erdoğan supporters discussed on Clubhouse how to exterminate political prisoners, suggested putting poison in their food**

In August and November audio records of chatrooms on social media app Clubhouse [revealed](#) a conversation among supporters of Turkish President Erdoğan on how to exterminate alleged followers of the Gülen movement who are currently in Turkish prisons. [More..](#)



## **Twitter's lawyer in Turkey tweeted hate speech against Gülen movement**

Lawyer Gonenç Gürkaynak, who represents Twitter in Turkey, used hate speech against supporters of the Gülen movement in a series of tweets in October, asking if they ever consider exterminating themselves. [More..](#)

### **Senior AKP figure targeted Gülen movement supporters in hate speech**

Mücahit Birinci, a member of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party's 50-seat Central Decision and Executive Board, targeted supporters of the faith-based Gülen movement during a news show in November, calling them demons and promising to make life unbearable for them everywhere in the world. [More..](#)

### **Pro-Erdoğan propagandist calls for extermination of Gülen movement followers**

Fatih Tezcan, a pro-Erdoğan propagandist, in August said on a live YouTube broadcast that followers of the Gülen movement should be massacred right away and that "it would be a waste" to use rat poison to kill them. [More..](#)

### **New York mosque funded by Turkish gov't denied religious services for Gülen movement supporter**

The Brooklyn Eyup Sultan Mosque, which is funded and operated by Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet), in July denied religious services for deceased Turkish-American businessman Muharrem Atmaca due to his links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Justice Ministry formed committees to identify employees with Gülen links, official document revealed**

An official document shared on Twitter in December by a former prosecutor showed how the Turkish Justice Ministry formed committees to identify employees with links to the faith-based Gülen movement in the aftermath of a coup attempt in July 2016. [More..](#)

Another set of official documents showed how Ministry of Health bureaucrats profiled alleged followers of the movement. [More..](#)

### **University refuses admission to woman jailed over Gülen links**

Ünzile Köşker, who was jailed for alleged links to the Gülen movement, was not allowed to enroll at a university despite passing the nationwide entrance exam because she "posed a risk." [More..](#)

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## ***Torture and inhuman treatment***

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### **Acts of torture, enforced disappearances in Turkey could amount to crimes against humanity, tribunal judges said**

The judges of the Turkey Tribunal, a civil society-led, symbolic international tribunal, in September announced their verdict on recent human rights violations in Turkey, saying that the torture and abductions perpetrated by Turkish state officials since July 2016 could amount to crimes against

humanity in an application lodged with an appropriate international body. [More..](#)

### **I was electrocuted, beaten and made impotent, said torture victim who shared his ordeal**

Ayhan Demir, 45, said he was made impotent as a result of the sexual torture and electrocution he was subjected to during his detention in the Mersin Police Department's counterterrorism unit in September 2016, due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)



### **Abducted and tortured, educator İnandı gave details of his ordeal at first hearing of his trial**

Orhan İnandı, a Turkish-Kyrgyz educator rendered to Turkey from Kyrgyzstan by Turkish intelligence, said at his first court hearing in November that he was tortured while in custody. [More..](#)

### **Top Turkish court ruled former teacher was tortured in police custody**

Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled on May 18, 2021 that a former teacher arrested for links to the Gülen movement was tortured in detention and his rights violated. [More..](#)

The top court also in September fined the government for torture in Afyon province, demanding an investigation into the perpetrators. [More..](#)

### **Former bureaucrat missing for 9 months turned up in Ankara prison**

Hüseyin Galip Küçüközyiğit, a former Turkish bureaucrat who had been missing since late 2020 and was suspected of being a victim of enforced disappearance, was found in an Ankara prison. His daughter Nursena Küçüközyiğit said in September that her grandmother [received a call](#) from a police officer informing her of her father's whereabouts.

After a visit to her father, Nursena said he had lost a significant amount of weight. [More..](#)

### **'I am tired of waiting,' said father of Yusuf Bilge Tunç, who disappeared 29 months ago**

"The authorities aren't doing anything to find my son, and I'm tired of waiting," said Mustafa Tunç, father of Yusuf Bilge Tunç, a former bureaucrat who disappeared in Ankara on August 6, 2019 in broad daylight, leaving no trace behind. [More..](#)

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## ***Children of the purge: death, disease and separation***

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### **9-year-old Turkish girl drowns while trying to cross Evros River**

Nine-year-old Nurefşan Teke drowned in March while trying to cross the Evros River with her mother Neslihan in order to reunite with her father, who had to flee Turkey five years earlier due to an ongoing government crackdown on alleged members of the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **5-year-old girl succumbed to cancer without saying goodbye to her jailed father**

Five-year-old Kübra Kuzan died of cancer in February without being able to see her father, a former bureaucrat removed from his job and jailed due to alleged links to Gülen movement, one last time after the authorities denied his request to visit her. [More..](#)

### **Gov't denied assistance to autistic teen due to father's alleged links to Gülen movement**

A district governor's office in Hatay province refused to provide assistance to the family of Rüveyda Tekgöz, a 16-year-old autistic girl, because her father was fired from his job due to alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Disabled girl forced to leave special needs school due to father's links to Gülen movement died**

Nurefşan Ketenci, a young girl with major disabilities who had been forced to leave a public special needs school in Turkey because her father used to work

for an institution that was shut down by a government decree for its affiliation with the Gülen movement, died in July. [More..](#)

### **11-year-old autistic boy succumbed to heart disease without saying goodbye to his jailed father**

Ömer Faruk Turan, 11, died of heart failure in December without being able to say goodbye to his father, who had been in prison for the past four-and-a-half years on terrorism charges over alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Turkey's post-coup crackdown left 2 more children separated from parents**

Ekrem, a one-and-a-half-year-old toddler, and his four-year-old sister Zülal became separated from not just one but both of their parents in January when their mother was arrested as part of a crackdown in Turkey targeting followers of the faith-based Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **With both parents in prison for Gülen links, neighbors helped care for 11-year-old cancer patient**

Sabriye Dağdeviren, the mother of 11-year-old leukemia patient Hakan, said her son was at times cared for by their neighbors during his treatment at the hospital because his grandmother also needs to tend to her 90-year-old mother. [More..](#)

### **2 toddlers left to care of grandparents after both parents jailed over Gülen links**

Murat, 29 months old, and Fatih Demir, 4, were left to the care of their grandparents after their parents were imprisoned in May due to alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Mother of special needs child was detained over alleged Gülen links**

Zeybegül Yılmaz, mother of a 5-year-old special needs child, was detained in July for alleged links to the Gülen movement. Yılmaz's son suffers from developmental problems and needs constant care. Salih's father was convicted of the same charges and is in prison. [More..](#)

### **Parents of 8-year-old boy suffering from epilepsy started serving sentences on Gülen link convictions**

The mother and father of an 8-year-old boy suffering from epilepsy were arrested in Edirne in August to serve prison sentences handed down for alleged links to the Gülen movement. The couple also have an 18-month-old daughter. The children were sent to live with their grandparents. [More..](#)

## **Woman suffering from cancer left to take care of disabled son alone after husband's arrest**

A woman suffering from cancer said in a letter in December she had been struggling to take care of her disabled son since the jailing of her husband for his alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

## **Caregiver of autistic teenager suffering from epilepsy arrested for Gülen links**

Eyüp Çetin, the father and caregiver of a 15-year-old autistic boy suffering from epilepsy and hypotonia, a muscle disease, was arrested in December over his alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

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## ***Arrest of pregnant women and mothers with infants***

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## **Woman faced detention over alleged Gülen links immediately after giving birth**



Hacer Yıldırım, who gave birth in the early hours of the new year in the Turkish capital city of Ankara, faced detention due to her alleged links to the Gülen movement. A photo from the hospital showed police officers waiting at Yıldırım's hospital room, waiting to detain her. [More..](#)

## **Pregnant woman sent to prison over Gülen links despite regulations**

Huriye Acun, a seven-month pregnant former teacher, was arrested in July and sent to prison to serve the sentence she was handed down due to alleged links to the faith-based Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Pregnant woman kept in prison for 6 months over Gülen links despite regulations**

Arzu Nur Özkan, a former teacher, was kept in prison for six months for alleged links to the Gülen movement despite being pregnant. Özkan was released a month before her due date following intense public pressure. [More..](#)

### **Former judge with 6-month-old baby sent to prison in defiance of legal provisions**

Esra Çiçeklidağ, a former judge dismissed from her job by a government decree, was arrested in November in violation of a Turkish law that requires the postponement of the execution of prison sentences for women who are pregnant or have given birth within the last year and a half. [More..](#)

### **9-month-old infant forced to accompany mother in prison quarantine cell**

A 9-month-old baby had to accompany her mother, Yasemin Melizci, 29, in a prison quarantine cell in January, sparking criticism from human rights activists. Although the Law on the Execution of Sentences and Security Measures stipulates that the “execution of the prison sentence is delayed for women who are pregnant or have given birth within the last 18 months,” Turkish authorities have been arresting mothers with children as young as 1 month old. [More..](#)

### **Turkish authorities unlawfully arrested woman with twins over alleged Gülen links**

Turkish authorities in April arrested Merve Hande Kayış, the mother of three children including 13-month-old twins, for alleged links to the Gülen movement in violation of the country’s laws. [More..](#)

### **Turkish authorities unlawfully arrested pregnant woman on alleged Gülen links**

Emel Top Bayraktar, 29, a research assistant at Bingöl University in eastern Turkey, was arrested for alleged links to the Gülen movement in April, despite being in the early stages of pregnancy. [More..](#)

### **Pregnant woman unlawfully arrested in Antalya for aiding families of post-coup victims**

A pregnant woman was unlawfully arrested in September for helping the families of individuals targeted by a post-coup crackdown in Turkey. [More..](#)

### **2 more infants joined their mother in Turkish prison**

In May 3-month-old Mehmet Mirza and 1-year-old Ahmet Ümit went with their mother, who was arrested for alleged links to the Gülen movement, to prison. [More..](#)



### **2.5-year-old child accompanied mother in Turkish prison after both parents arrested**

Melek Cesur, who was arrested in December to serve her six-year, three-month prison sentence for alleged links to the Gülen movement, had to take her two-and-a-half-year-old with her after her husband was also arrested. [More..](#)

### **Mother of 19-month-old sent to prison with her toddler over Gülen links**

Rukiye Güler, a homemaker with three children, was sent to prison in March to serve a six-year, three-month sentence for alleged links to the Gülen movement, accompanied by her 19-month-old daughter. [More..](#)

### **345 children under the age of 6 in prison with their mothers in Turkey**

A total of 345 children under the age of 6 are accompanying their mothers in Turkish prisons, and they receive the same treatment as inmates, according to a study by the Right to Life Association. [More..](#)

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## ***Ailing prisoners denied proper care***

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### **Turkish authorities arrested disabled bomb disposal expert on terrorism conviction**

Bilal Konakçı, a bomb disposal expert with the police who lost his hand and was blinded in an explosion, was arrested in February after Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals upheld a conviction and sentence handed down on the charge of membership in a terrorist organization. [More..](#)

### **Ailing 84-year-old imprisoned after appeals court upheld politically motivated conviction**

Nusret Muğla, 84, who suffers from multiple health problems, was arrested in January after the Supreme Court of Appeals upheld a previous conviction that was based on politically motivated charges. [More..](#)

### **Critically ill woman sent to prison after authorities refused to postpone her sentence**

Turkish authorities in October refused to postpone the execution of the prison sentence of critically ill Ayşe Özdoğan, who was arrested and sent to prison on a terrorism conviction. [More..](#)

### **82-year-old philanthropist with Alzheimer's was forced to remain behind bars**

Eighty-two-year-old businessman and philanthropist Yusuf Bekmezci remained behind bars despite serious health problems and advanced age. [More..](#)

### **Prosecutor dropped negligence charges in case of critically ill inmate released 2 weeks before death**

The Silivri Public Prosecutor's Office in March said there were no grounds for legal action in the case of Deniz Hakan Şen, an inmate who died of cancer after being denied timely treatment and was released only two weeks before his death, claiming "he would have died even if he had received treatment." [More..](#)

### **Man arrested for Gülen links developed severe mental health problems in solitary cell**

Akif Sarı, who was arrested for alleged links to the Gülen movement, developed severe psychological problems after being kept in a solitary cell for more than a year. [More..](#)

### **72-year-old man jailed over Gülen links not released despite suffering from heart failure**

A 72-year-old man jailed for alleged links to the Gülen movement despite congestive heart failure was not released from prison and was scheduled to undergo heart surgery in December. [More..](#)

### **Turkish authorities denied release to critically ill cancer patient arrested on Gülen links**

Yusuf Özmen, who was arrested in March to serve a sentence on a Gülen-linked conviction despite having stage 4 cancer, remained in prison despite a medical report saying he was almost totally disabled. [More..](#)

### **Late-stage cancer patient arrested over Gülen links**

Refik Yeşil, 68, a late stage cancer patient, was arrested in December on terrorism charges for alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

### **Inmate with cancer sent back to prison only a week after major surgery**

Hakan Kanat, an inmate who was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, was sent back to prison only a week after major surgery and made to stay in a quarantine cell. [More..](#)

### **Teacher suffering from cancer was jailed over alleged Gülen links**

Fatımatüzzehra Babacan, a teacher struggling with thyroid cancer for the past 10 years, was imprisoned in August after an appeals court upheld her six year, three month prison sentence for membership in a terrorist organization. [More..](#)

### **Nurse started serving sentence on Gülen link conviction despite severe illness**

Hava Dönmez, a nurse struggling with thyroid cancer for the past three years, was imprisoned in August after an appeals court upheld her six year, three month sentence for membership in a terrorist organization. [More..](#)

### **Mother of three suffering from thyroid cancer was arrested for Gülen links**

Gülden Aşık, a mother of three who suffers from thyroid cancer, was arrested in September after being sentenced to six years, three months in prison for alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

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## ***Property rights***

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### **Turkey's Maarif Foundation took over 216 Gülen-linked schools in 44 countries, chairman said**

Birol Akgün, chairman of Turkey's Maarif Foundation, in March said during an online meeting that they had taken over 216 schools affiliated with the Gülen movement in 44 countries. [More..](#)

### **7 pro-gov't foundations divided up 769 dormitories seized over Gülen links**

Seven pro-government foundations in Turkey shared among themselves 769 of 848 student dormitories seized for affiliation with the Gülen movement since a coup attempt in 2016, documents shared by journalist Metin Cihan on Twitter in October revealed. [More..](#)

### **Appeals court upheld sentences given to İpek family members**

A regional appeals court in May upheld prison sentences given to members of the İpek family, whose İpek Holding was seized by the Turkish government in 2015 due to their alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)

## **Turkish gov't threatened to evict elderly woman from home she's leaving to charity**

The Turkish Directorate General of Foundations has requested that Ayşe Özer, 80, either pay five years of accumulated rent or vacate her home, which she bequeathed to a charitable foundation in her will. The foundation was shut down by a government decree after the coup attempt. [More..](#)

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## **Deaths**

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[Ersoy Karamustafa](#), a former teacher arrested over alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in prison in February of COVID-19.

[Önder Ateş](#), another former teacher arrested over alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in prison of COVID-19 in March.

[Mustafa Çamaş](#), a prominent bioengineering professor fired from his job by a government decree in the aftermath of a July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, died in March at a construction site after a crane fell on him.

[Alparslan Güngör](#), a former judge who was imprisoned for three years on alleged Gülen links and diagnosed with stage four lung cancer shortly after his release, died in April.

[Abdülazim Özdemir](#), 49, an engineer who was diagnosed with liver cancer during his 24-month incarceration on terrorism charges due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in April.

[Abdulvahit Tunçay](#), a former police officer who was fired in the aftermath of a coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 and was subsequently jailed, died of cancer in April after his belated release from prison.

[Mehmet Şükrü Eken](#), a former brigadier general who was sentenced to life in prison over links to the Gülen movement and for "seeking to overthrow the government," died of COVID-19 in April.

[İsmet Torun](#), a businessman who was diagnosed with stomach cancer during his 38-month incarceration due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in Ankara in May after his release from prison.

[Yeşim Coşkun](#), wife of Yusuf Coşkun, a former teacher who was arrested on terrorism charges due to his links to the Gülen movement, died in May, leaving their children to be taken care of by relatives.

[Şeref Vatanserver](#), a former computer science teacher dismissed from his job during a post-coup purge in Turkey and jailed over Gülen movement links, died of COVID-19 in prison in May.

**Emin Köşeler**, a teacher who was dismissed from his job on alleged links to the Gülen movement and later jailed on the same charges, succumbed to cancer in May.

**Halil Şimşek**, a dismissed academic arrested over alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in prison in May of COVID-19.

**Ahmet Kaptan**, a retired imam imprisoned on alleged links to the Gülen movement who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer while in prison, succumbed to cancer in June.

**Erkan Akilli**, a teacher who was convicted on terrorism charges due to his links to the Gülen movement, died in October, a few hours after crossing into Greece via the Evros River.

**İbrahim Kılınc**, who fled to Germany in search of a safer life after being sentenced to prison in Turkey for alleged links to the Gülen movement, died of a heart attack in October.

**İhsan Yıldız**, a former teacher imprisoned over his alleged links to the Gülen movement, died in October of cancer after he was released well after the cancer had advanced.

**Yurdal Gökçe**, a former police officer who was dismissed by an emergency decree after the coup attempt, died in November after falling from the roof of a building under construction where was working as a laborer.

**Recep Yaya**, a former teacher summarily dismissed from his job by an emergency decree after the coup attempt, took his own life in November.

**Leyla Kurt**, whose husband was imprisoned on conviction of alleged links to the Gülen movement, succumbed to cancer in December without being able to see her husband one last time.

### 3. Crackdown on the Kurdish political movement

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. In June Turkey's top court accepted an indictment seeking to disband HDP.

The party's offices also faced physical attacks, most notably in June in the western province of İzmir where a gunman shot dead party member Deniz Poyraz.



HDP's charismatic former leader Selahattin Demirtaş remained behind bars on politically motivated charges despite rulings by Turkey's Constitutional Court and the ECtHR. Scores of former HDP politicians are also in prison either in pre-trial detention or serving sentences after being convicted of terrorism offenses on the basis of non-violent political activities, speeches, and social media postings.

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 2021 about the ongoing crackdown on the Kurdish political movement:

#### **Turkey's top court accepted indictment seeking to disband pro-Kurdish party**

Turkey's Constitutional Court on accepted an indictment by a top prosecutor seeking to disband a pro-Kurdish opposition party on terror-related charges June 21.

The court ruled in favor of hearing the case against the HDP, filed by the chief public prosecutor, who is accusing it of allegedly colluding with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and of seeking to "destroy the unity of the state." [More..](#)

## **Turkish courts continued to target former leaders of HDP**

An Ankara court in January has accepted an indictment naming 108 people including jailed Kurdish leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, who have been behind bars on politically motivated charges since November 2016, in connection to street protests in the country's Southeast in 2014 that claimed the lives of 37 people. [More..](#)

A court in March sentenced Demirtaş to three years, six months in prison for insulting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. [More..](#)

In April, Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals has upheld a prison sentence of four years, eight months given to Demirtaş due to a speech he delivered during a Nevruz celebration in İstanbul on March 17, 2013. [More..](#)

In May an Ankara court sentenced Demirtaş to two years, six months' imprisonment for "targeting officials who took part in counterterrorism efforts" due to his criticism of former Ankara chief public prosecutor Yüksel Kocaman in his defense statement during a trial. [More..](#)

## **Turkish parliament expelled pro-Kurdish lawmaker known for human rights activism**

Turkey's parliament in March [expelled](#) HDP lawmaker and prominent human rights defender Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu after a controversial conviction over a social media post. Gergerlioğlu was later sent to prison and released in July after a [ruling](#) by Turkey's Constitutional Court and returned to parliament. [More..](#)



## **Woman killed in attack on pro-Kurdish party office in Turkey**

In June, an assailant killed a party official, Deniz Poyraz, in an attack on a provincial office of HDP in İzmir province. [More..](#)

In July, a lone gunman [staged an attack](#) on the district office of HDP in Turkey's holiday resort of Marmaris. The same office was attacked only a couple of weeks later, with an attacker

breaking the windows. [More..](#)

## **Kurdish leader Demirtaş's books displayed among criminal 'evidence' seized in police raid**

Three books authored by Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş — "Leylan," "Devran" and "Seher" — were displayed among criminal "evidence" seized in a police raid in November. [More..](#)

### **Appeals court upheld 22-year sentence given to former Kurdish MP Güven**

A regional appeals court in Diyarbakır in June upheld a prison sentence of 22 years, three months handed down to former Kurdish lawmaker, Leyla Güven, who was ousted from the Turkish Parliament in June 2020, on terrorism charges. She was also the co-chairperson of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), the umbrella group of the Kurdish political movement. [More..](#)

Güven was also handed down a prison sentence of five years by a Hakkari court for disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization in November. [More..](#)

### **Former HDP deputy Aysel Tuğluk sentenced to 20 months for spreading ‘terrorist propaganda’**



A court in the province of Van in October sentenced Aysel Tuğluk, the former deputy co-chair of the HDP, to 20 months in prison for disseminating the propaganda of a terrorist organization. She is currently serving a 10-year sentence on charges of acting as the executive of a terrorist organization and taking orders from Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), an armed secessionist group listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the US. [More..](#)

Tuğluk, who was denied release in September despite medical reports, suffers from dementia and can’t look after herself, according to her lawyer

Reyhan Yalçındağ. [More..](#)

### **European rights court delivered verdicts in Kurdish politicians’ cases**

In February, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has delivered its verdict in the case of 10 politicians from the now-closed People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) 14 years after the case was brought before it. The court said Turkey had violated the plaintiffs’ right to freedom of assembly and association. [More..](#)

In May the ECtHR fined Turkey for violating the freedom of expression of Filiz Kerestecioğlu, an HDP lawmaker, by lifting her parliamentary immunity based on a constitutional amendment in 2016. [More..](#)

### **Turkey’s top court fined gov’t for torture of Kurdish party chairman in police custody**

Turkey’s top court in February ruled in favor of İbrahim Halil Baran, chairman of the Kurdish Partiya Kurdistanî (PAKURD), who submitted an individual



application to the court in 2017 claiming that he was tortured by police in detention in southeastern Şanlıurfa province. [More..](#)

### **Police, not the PKK, killed Tahir Elçi, Forensic Architecture's investigation reveals**

An indictment concerning the killing of prominent human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi that charges a Kurdish militant with murder is not realistic, according to an investigation released by Forensic Architecture, a London-based multidisciplinary research group, in March. [More..](#)

### **Remains of 261 alleged members of PKK buried next to sewage line, not returned to families, opposition deputy says**

The remains of 261 alleged members of PKK that were removed from Garzan Cemetery in Bitlis province in December 2017 were buried in a mass grave next to a sewage line in an İstanbul cemetery and not returned to their families, HDP deputy Hüda Kaya said in April. [More..](#)

### **Erdoğan did not let PKK lay down arms, says jailed Kurdish leader**

Jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş has claimed that President Erdoğan did not allow the PKK to lay down their arms after efforts at reconciliation between his government and the group because he thought the end of armed conflict in the country would not politically benefit his government. [More..](#)

### **Pro-Kurdish party member abducted, tortured by men posing as police**

Celalettin Yalçın, a member of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was abducted and subjected to torture in August by individuals who introduced themselves as "the police" in İstanbul. [More..](#)

### **German police tell former MP he's on hit list targeting gov't critics in exile**

The German Federal Police have warned Hasip Kaplan, a former lawmaker from the HDP, of a planned assassination targeting him based on a hit list that includes the names of 55 critics of the Turkish government living in exile. [More..](#)

## 4. Minority and Refugee Rights

Minorities and refugees in Turkey continued to suffer from rights violations, hate speech and attacks throughout the year. 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 especially against the Kurds, contributing to the rise of hate crimes.

The government has made little effort to address the religious freedom issues including granting minority religious communities' legal personality and permission to hold board member elections; recognizing Alevi houses of worship (cemevleri); and reopening the Theological School of Halki, a Patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church seminary.

Turkey is home to a total of 4,038,857 refugees from around the world, according to the [latest figures](#) provided by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu. Attitudes about refugees fleeing the long conflict in Syria have gradually hardened in the country, where they used to be welcomed with open arms, sympathy and compassion, as the number of newcomers has swelled over the past decade.

Anti-immigrant sentiment reached a boiling point, fueled by Turkey's economic woes. With unemployment high and the price of food and housing skyrocketing, many Turks turned their frustration toward the refugees in the country, particularly the 3.7 million who fled the civil war in Syria.

The prospect of a new influx of refugees following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan served to reinforce the unreceptive public mood. Videos purporting to show young Afghan men being smuggled into Turkey from Iran caused public outrage and led to calls for the government to safeguard the country's borders.

Here is some of the most important news from 2021 in the field of minority and refugee rights:

### **Kurds continued to face discrimination and hate speech**

Seven members of a Kurdish family were killed in July in central Turkey by armed assailants who tried to burn their house down in what rights activists said was a racist attack. [More..](#)

In August armed groups [set up](#) checkpoints in different parts of Antalya province amid rumors that wildfires ravaging the region were started by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). A group of people reportedly stopped a car and beat a man apparently because he was Kurdish. [More..](#)

A Kurdish family from northern Iraq's Erbil province was attacked in an apparent hate crime while they were visiting Turkey's southern Mersin province in May. [More..](#)

In July a group of seasonal workers were attacked in Afyon province and a Kurdish family was attacked in Konya. [More..](#)

### **Restrictions on use of the Kurdish language**

Kurdish was not included among the six languages that are supported by KADES, a smartphone app designed by the Turkish National Police for use by women to ask for help in cases of domestic violence. [More..](#)

Disapproval of the use of Kurdish was high on the agenda in August, with a popular TV host criticizing her guest for speaking Kurdish on live television and a prison administration investigating several prisoners for singing in Kurdish. [More..](#)

Kurdish singer Mem Ararat said in a statement in December that a concert of his that was scheduled to take place at Ankara's Neşet Ertaş Culture Center was cancelled by the authorities because it included Kurdish songs. [More..](#)

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

### **Government vehicles hit 57 pedestrians in 4 years, killing 16 and injuring 41**

A total of 16 pedestrians, including nine children and a disabled person, have died after being hit by government vehicles since 2018. The killing of civilians by armored vehicles is common in Turkey's Southeast, where there is a heavy military presence due to ongoing clashes between the Turkish military and the outlawed PKK. [More..](#)

In November a police officer was given a reduced sentence of four years, five months and 10 days for the death of Şahin Öner, 18, after he hit him with an armored vehicle, due to "good conduct" displayed during the hearings, despite the fact that the defendant never appeared in court. [More..](#)



### **Kurdish inmate who claimed prison guards beat and sexually harassed her found dead in her cell**

Garibe Gezer, an inmate who alleged that she was beaten and sexually harassed by prison guards in Kocaeli's Kandira Prison, was found dead in her cell in December. [More..](#)

### **Gendarmerie commander responsible for burning down Kurdish village, killing 9, Turkish court said**

Bülent Karaoğlu, a former gendarmerie officer, was responsible for the burning down of the southeastern Turkish village of Altınova (Vartinis) in 1993, which caused the death of nine people,

including seven children, the first chamber of Turkey's Supreme Court of Appeals said in May. [More..](#)

### **Former Turkish minister was planning attack on Alevi house of worship, mob boss claimed**

A Turkish crime boss who had been making scandalous allegations about the relationship between state actors and the mafia claimed in June that former Turkish interior minister and police chief Mehmet Ağar was planning an attack on a cemevi, an Alevi house of worship. [More..](#)

### **US religious freedom commission said situation of Turkey's Alevi community getting worse under Erdoğan leadership**

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) pointed out that discrimination against the Alevi community in Turkey was rampant and pervasive and that the situation under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was only getting worse, in a message issued in July on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the Sivas Massacre. [More..](#)

### **Alevi houses marked with red paint sparked fear among residents**

A number of Alevi residences were marked with red paint in Turkey's northwestern Yalova province, bringing back memories of violence against the community in the past after their houses were similarly marked. [More..](#)

### **In possible sign of official discrimination, villages were identified as Alevi on Turkish Health Ministry map**

The Turkish Ministry of Health was allegedly using a map of northern Tokat province on which Alevi villages appeared to be clearly marked, a patient's relative revealed, leading to the fear of official discrimination against Alevi patients. [More..](#)

### **Armenian cultural heritage faced destruction**

An Armenian church dating to 1603 in the western province of Kütahya that was on the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism's preservation list was demolished in January after it was acquired by a private party. [More..](#)

In March an old Armenian cemetery was destroyed during construction in Ankara's Ulus district as part of gentrification project, and human remains were found at the site. [More..](#)

An old Armenian cemetery in Turkey's eastern province of Van was destroyed by bulldozers in August and bones were scattered across the field, sparking outrage among the Armenian community and opposition politicians. [More..](#)



An Armenian Protestant church in Diyarbakır province was leased to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for a period of 10 years to serve as a public library. [More..](#)

The Surp Yerrortutyun (Holy Trinity) Armenian church in central Turkey's Akşehir district will serve as the "World's Masters of Humor Art House" as part of a project to found a "humor village" in the hometown of famous 13th century Turkish satirist Nasreddin Hoca. [More..](#)

### **Far-right MP attacked Armenian lawmaker, threatening genocide**

A far-right independent member of the Turkish Parliament threatened Turkish-Armenian lawmaker Garo Paylan with facing the same fate as his ancestors amid debates over the recognition of the mass killings of Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman Empire as genocide by the US administration. [More..](#)

### **US religious freedom commission recommended placing Turkey on special watch list for severe violations**

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that the State Department place Turkey on its special watch list based on the Turkish government's perpetration or toleration of severe violations of religious freedom, in its annual report released in April. [More..](#)



### **Pro-gov't daily targeted Turkish journalist in antisemitic attack**

The pro-government Takvim daily in March launched an antisemitic attack against Karel Valansi, a Turkish journalist and foreign policy analyst, in a report critical of İstanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. The report, headlined "[İmamoğlu] shows animosity to a Turk but great politeness to a Jew," said İmamoğlu "showed too much respect to a Jewish journalist working in Turkey." [More..](#)

## **Last traces of Ankara's Jews in peril**

The Jewish heritage of Turkey's capital city of Ankara, which dates back to the 2nd century BC, was faced with destruction as the abandoned homes of the city's Jews, who at one point numbered around 5,000, were identified as a site for urban renewal. [More..](#)

## **Assyrian, Chaldean associations called on Turkish authorities to investigate disappearance of villagers**

Chaldean and Assyrian associations in Europe, the United States, Australia and Iraq sent a joint letter to Turkey's justice and interior ministers in February demanding a thorough investigation into the disappearance of Chaldean villager Hurmüz Diril and the murder of his wife Şimoni Diril. [More..](#)

## **Assyrian priest given jail sentence on terror charges**

A Turkish court in April handed down a 25-month prison sentence to an Assyrian priest in southeastern Turkey on charges of aiding the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). [More..](#)

## **Roma conscript died under suspicious circumstances following hate speech by his commander**

Caner Sarmaşık, 20, a conscript who was being targeted for being Roma, allegedly died by suicide while on guard duty on April 29. According to his family Sarmaşık told them during a phone call a week before his death that he was being targeted with hate speech by his commander for being Roma. [More..](#)

## **Turkish university cancelled World Greek Language Day events due to xenophobic pushback**

The faculty of languages, history and geography of Turkey's Ankara University in February announced that it had canceled plans to mark World Greek Language Day on February 9 after being targeted by pro-government newspapers and receiving condemnation and pushback on social media. [More..](#)

## **Syrian refugees continued to suffer from hate speech, discrimination and attacks**

In August a group of locals [attacked](#) houses, workplaces and cars owned by Syrians in Ankara's Altındağ district, chanting anti-Syrian slogans. [More..](#)

Three Syrian men were killed in an alleged hate crime in Turkey's İzmir province in November. A Turk poured gasoline over the Syrians while they were asleep and set them on fire. The man later [admitted](#) to having committed the hate crime. [More..](#)



A Syrian refugee family living in Turkey's Gaziantep province was attacked in their home on March 28 in an apparent hate crime. [More..](#)

A Somali restaurant in Ankara's central Kızılay district was attacked in April following anti-migrant reporting by the Sözcü daily. [More..](#)

A large number of Syrian residents of İzmir's Cumhuriyet neighborhood left their homes after tensions increased following the alleged murder of 17-year-old Batuhan Barlak by a 20-year-old Syrian refugee in September. [More..](#)

Refugees in Turkey's northwestern city of Bolu said they have been confronted with more hate crimes since the city council approved a discriminatory proposal imposing exorbitant fees on foreigners to access public services in the city. [More..](#)

A group of streetcleaners assaulted a Syrian man who was collecting trash in Antalya province, crushing his motorcycle and setting it on fire. [More..](#)

A refugee who had been living in İstanbul with her children for four months was beaten up and threatened by neighbors and insulted at the police station. [More..](#)

Eleven Syrian refugees who were detained in October after sharing videos on social media showing them eating bananas in an effort to condemn racism and discrimination in Turkey faced deportation. [More..](#)

In a landmark decision in December, a Turkish court handed down a prison sentence of 25 years to a police officer who shot a young Syrian refugee to death in 2020. [More..](#)

### **Prosecutor declined to pursue case against gendarmes who allegedly threw refugees into Evros River**

The Edirne Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in December declined to pursue a case against gendarmes who allegedly threw refugees into a river after they were pushed back by Greece, without taking the testimony of all the witnesses and the accused. [More..](#)

### **Human Rights Watch accused Turkish soldiers of beating and pushing Afghan asylum seekers back to Iran**

Turkish authorities are summarily pushing Afghan asylum seekers crossing into the country from Iran back to Iran, denying them the right to seek asylum, in violation of international law, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in an October statement. [More..](#)

## **Turkish far-right group beat Afghan man and shared video on social media**

A new Turkish far-right group in December shared a video on social media showing one of their members beating an Afghan refugee in an apparent hate crime. [More..](#)

## **2 refugees severely beaten by security officers in Turkish repatriation center**

Two refugees, one Syrian and the other Palestinian, were severely beaten by security officers at a repatriation center in Turkey's western İzmir province on May 11. [More..](#)

## **Hate speech against refugees increased on Turkish social media as a new wave of Afghan migrants arrived**

Hate speech against refugees on Turkish social media increased in July, with a new wave of refugee arrivals in Turkey starting as the Taliban increased the territory it controlled in Afghanistan amid a US troop withdrawal. [More..](#)



## **Turkey was ranked 48th among 49 countries on LGBT rights in rainbow index**

Turkey was ranked 48th among 49 countries as regards the human rights of LGBT people, according to the 2021 Rainbow Europe Map published by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)-Europe. [More..](#)

## **Targeted by Erdoğan, Turkey's LGBT community faced 'tsunami of hate'**

Turkey's President Erdoğan in February unleashed a torrent of attacks against what he called "the LGBT youth," which came as sudden student protests began to rattle his 18-year rule. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu reported the arrest of "four LGBT freaks" over the display, condemning the "degenerates" in Twitter posts that got flagged for "hateful conduct". [More..](#)

## **3 transsexual women attacked in one week as violence against LGBT+ community increased in Turkey**

The LGBT+ community in Turkey witnessed multiple acts of violence against its members in March with at least three transsexual women suffering injuries or death. [More..](#)



## 5. Press freedom



The Turkish government continued to muzzle the press in 2021 in a variety of ways, including imprisoning journalists and using regulatory authorities to exert financial pressure.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Turkey, once the world's worst jailer of journalists, is [now ranked sixth](#) in CPJ's 2021 prison census after releasing 20 jailed journalists in the last year, but this doesn't mean media freedom has improved in the country.

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 or TV broadcasts.

Turkey has dropped precipitously since it was ranked 100th among 139 countries when Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published its first worldwide index in 2002, the year the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. The country was ranked 153rd out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index.

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 continued to increase its control over social media through restrictive laws. According to Freedom House's [yearly report](#) on global Internet freedom, Internet freedom continued to decline for a third year in a row in Turkey. Hundreds of websites were blocked, online content deemed critical of President Erdoğan or his ruling AKP was removed from websites and social media platforms, while online

activists, journalists and social media users were harassed both physically and online for their social media posts.

Here is some of the most important news from 2021 in the field of press freedom:

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## ***Journalism on Trial***

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### **5 journalists sentenced to prison on terrorism charges**

A court in Antalya province convicted three journalists of membership in a terrorist organization and two others of aiding a terrorist organization over their links to the Gülen movement on September 21.

Cihat Ünal, Ömer Özdemir and Serhat Şeftali, who worked for the Cihan news agency, were sentenced to six years, three months in prison each. Osman Yakut, a journalist for the Zaman daily, and Olgun Matur, owner of the Bizim Antalya news website, were both sentenced to three years, two months. [More..](#)

### **Journalists, human rights activist given suspended sentences on terror charges in Özgür Gündem trial**

A high criminal court in İstanbul handed down suspended sentences on February 15 to three journalists and prominent human rights activist Eren Keskin, who were all tried on charges of terrorism for guest-editing Özgür Gündem, a now-defunct newspaper that had focused on Kurdish issues, and for campaigning against efforts to censor it in 2016. [More..](#)

### **Turkish court imposes house arrest, travel ban on 3 YouTube journalists**

Three YouTube journalists known for their candid street interviews who were detained after police raided their homes were ordered to remain under house arrest and subjected to a travel ban by a court in December. [More..](#)

### **2 journalists given suspended sentences on charges of revealing state secrets**

A high criminal court in Ankara handed down suspended sentences to Müyesser Yıldız, the Ankara news editor of the OdaTV news website, and İsmail Dükel, the Ankara representative of the TELE1 television channel, on charges of revealing state secrets on March 8. [More..](#)

### **Photojournalist who captured murder of Kurdish student by police standing trial on terror charges**

The trial of photojournalist Abdurrahman Gök, who captured the murder of a Kurdish student on film, is continuing at the Diyarbakır 5th High Criminal Court. Gök faces 20 years in prison on charges of “membership in a terrorist organization” and “disseminating terrorist propaganda.” In 2017 Gök took a

series of photographs showing university student Kemal Kurkut being shot to death by a police officer during Nevruz celebrations in Diyarbakır. [More..](#)

### **European Court of Human Rights rulings in journalists' cases**

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) said in January that the rights of famous singer and columnist Atilla Taş, who was jailed for 14 months in a post-coup crackdown in Turkey, were violated and ruled that Turkey was to pay Taş 12,275 euros in non-pecuniary damages. [More..](#)

The ECtHR ruled in December, in the case of prominent journalist Nazlı Ilıcak, 77, that working for media outlets close to the Gülen movement and expressing doubts about the Turkish government's narrative on an attempted coup were not plausible grounds for terrorism-related charges.

The ECtHR faulted Turkey for violating Ilıcak's rights to liberty and security as well as freedom of expression, stating that the charges that led to her imprisonment for more than three years are not plausible. The Strasbourg court ordered Turkey to pay Ilıcak 16,000 euros in non-pecuniary damages. [More..](#)

The court has yet to deliver verdicts on the cases of dozens of other journalists from Turkey, many of whom have been behind bars for a number of years.

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## ***Transnational Repression of Journalists***

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### **Turkey sought INTERPOL Red Notice for exiled journalist Dündar**



A Turkish court issued an arrest warrant and decided to submit a Red Notice request for former editor-in-chief of the Cumhuriyet daily and journalist in exile Can Dündar on June 8. The warrant was issued over Dündar's failure to attend a hearing on the legal action brought against him on charges of "disclosing confidential information related to the state's security and political interests" and "acquiring the confidential information of the state for political and military espionage." [More..](#)

### **Turkish journalist living in exile attacked outside home in Germany**

Erk Acarer, a Turkish journalist who is critical of President Erdoğan's government and has been living in exile in Germany, was attacked outside his home in Berlin on July 8 by three men who reportedly warned him to stop writing. [More..](#)

## **Turkey froze assets of 770 people, including journalists, over alleged terrorism links**

Turkey on December 24 froze the assets of 770 people including some journalists in exile for alleged terrorism financing. Journalists on the list include Adem Yavuz Arslan, Bülent Keneş, Cevheri Güven, Said Sefa, Sevgi Akarçeşme, Sevinç Özarslan, Mehmet Efe Çaman and Tarık Toros. [More..](#)

## **Swedish Supreme Court rejects Turkey's extradition request for exiled journalist**

The Swedish Supreme Court in December rejected a request from Turkey for the extradition of journalist Levent Kenez, ruling that Turkey's allegations against him did not contain a criminal element under Swedish law. The high court also stated that if Kenez returned to Turkey, he would face the risk of persecution. [More..](#)

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## ***Violence against Journalists***

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### **'Turkish police tried to kill me,' prominent photojournalist Kılıç claims**



Award-winning photojournalist Bülent Kılıç, who was detained during a Pride parade in İstanbul on June 26, said the police tried to kill him after pushing him to the ground.

"They tried to kill me, they tried to prevent me from breathing," Kılıç said after he was released. [More..](#)

## **Turkish journalist attacked after criticizing far-right party founder**

Turkish journalist Levent Gültekin, a columnist for the Diken news website and an outspoken critic of the ruling AKP, was assaulted by a group of about two dozen people on March 8 after he criticized Alparslan Türkeş, the founder of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). [More..](#)

## **Gov't crackdown on critical media turning into systematic violence against journalists: report**

A June report by Turkey's Progressive Journalists Association (ÇGD) has drawn attention to a series of physical attacks targeting members of the press, saying they were a result of the ruling AKP's oppressive policies. [More..](#)

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## ***Internet Freedom***

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### **Internet freedom continues to decline in Turkey: Freedom House report**

A yearly report by Freedom House on global Internet freedom revealed that Internet freedom continued to decline for a third year in a row in Turkey and that hundreds of websites were blocked during the period covered. [More..](#)

### **More than 349,000 websites banned in Turkey in last 5 years**

A total of 349,763 websites were banned in Turkey between 2016 and 2020, the Freedom of Expression Association's (İFÖD) EngelliWeb initiative said in its 2020 annual report, which was released in August. [More..](#)

### **Turkey maintains global lead in Twitter censorship requests**

Turkey continued to be the worst country in the world in terms of Twitter censorship, with the highest number of third-party takedown requests, court orders and accounts and tweets withheld, the platform's latest transparency report showed. [More..](#)

### **Turkish gov't to create 'truth ministry' amid rising censorship**

The Communications Directorate of the Turkish Presidency has announced that Turkey will create its own fact-checking mechanism to "fight lies and false facts on social media." According to the directorate's statement, the DOĞRU MU (Is it true?) online app, which will be available for IOS and Android systems, is designed to "meet the need to know whether news and information circulating on social media is true or false." [More..](#)

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## ***Fines and Discrimination against Critical Media***

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### **Turkey's broadcasting watchdog fines stations critical of gov't \$1.84 million in 2021**

Turkey's Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) imposed TL 21.5 million (\$1.84 million) in fines in 2021 on TV channels with critical stances towards the government according to data shared on social media by RTÜK member İlhan Taşcı in December. [More..](#)

### **Erdoğan government targets independent outlets receiving foreign funding**

A new regulation will be implemented for media outlets that receive financial support from overseas, Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun [said](#) in July, in response to news about foreign funds received by some independent media outlets in Turkey.

In response, press freedom groups expressed concern about possible legislation to regulate foreign funding for media and the dissemination of fake news, saying it could further curtail independent journalism in Turkey. [More..](#)

### **Turkish presidency refuses to renew press cards of 1,371 journalists**

Turkey's Presidential Communications Directorate, which has received 10,486 applications from journalists for the renewal of their press cards, [refused to renew](#) the press cards of 1,371 journalists.

Press freedom watchdog RSF condemned Turkey's Presidential Communications Directorate for using press accreditation to increase pressure on the media. [More..](#)

## 6. Torture and inhuman treatment

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

The enormous gulf between Turkey's constitutional provisions for the protection of human rights and the grim reality on the ground continued to grow during the year. In a landmark decision, Turkey's Constitutional Court in November 2020 [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.

Turkey is party to several international conventions that have different review and inspection mechanisms such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. According to information published on the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs [website](#), the country is currently party to 16 UN human rights conventions and 121 of the CoE's 225 conventions and has signed 31 other conventions.

Yet in the recent past the Turkish government has continuously disregarded the provisions of the constitution and failed to uphold its international obligations. For instance, Turkey has for four years [blocked the publication of a report](#) by a CoE delegation that paid a fact-finding visit to Turkey in 2016 to investigate allegations of torture and ill treatment in Turkish correctional facilities.

The CoE's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) confirmed in two reports [published](#) in August 2020 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.

Here is some of the most important news from 2021 in the field of torture and inhuman treatment:

### **Female inmate who claimed prison guards beat and sexually harassed her found dead in her cell**

Garibe Gezer, an inmate who alleged that she was beaten and sexually harassed by prison guards in Kocaeli's Kandıra Prison, was found dead in her cell in December. "She was a torture victim. She was staying in a solitary cell [due to disciplinary action]," her lawyer and human rights defender Eren Keskin said. "How can a woman hang herself in a cell?" [More..](#)

### **Educator İnandı tortured and his arm broken in 3 places, wife says**

Orhan İnandı, a Turkish-Kyrgyz educator rendered from Kyrgyzstan by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT), was tortured and his right arm broken in three places by Turkish security officers, his wife Reyhan said. [More..](#)

### **Top Turkish court ruled former teacher was tortured in police custody**

Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled on May 18, 2021 that a former teacher arrested for links to the Gülen movement was tortured in detention and his rights violated. [More..](#)

### **Activist Öztürk says she was subjected to brutal torture in secret detention center**



Ayten Öztürk, 47, who describes herself as a socialist activist, said she was subjected to severe torture and sexual harassment in a secret detention center in Ankara in 2018. Öztürk said she lost 25 kilos during the detention. "They told me they were given the authority to do anything to me," she said. "They told me they would continue torturing me until I cooperated

with them." [More..](#)

### **Turkish soldiers allegedly tortured two Iranian men at border post, killing one**

Two Iranian smugglers were allegedly subjected to abuse and torture at an army post on the Iranian border in the Turkish province of Van. The two men, Hasan Kecelanlu and Behnam Semedi, were held at a police station in a border village where they were allegedly beaten, attacked with knives and tortured with cold water. [More..](#)

### **I was electrocuted, beaten and made impotent, torture victim says**

Ayhan Demir, 45, said he was made impotent as a result of the sexual torture and electrocution he was subjected to during his detention in the Mersin Police Department's counterterrorism unit in September 2016, due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More..](#)



## **Turkey's top court fined gov't for torture in Afyon province, demanded investigation into perpetrators**

Turkish Constitutional Court ruled in favor of an applicant who claimed he was tortured for 25 days during his detention at Afyon police headquarters in 2016, ordering the Turkish government to pay TL 50,000 (\$6,000) in non-pecuniary damages and to launch an investigation into the perpetrators. [More..](#)

## **Prosecutor finds no grounds for legal action against policemen who allegedly mistreated Kurdish minors**



The Van Public Prosecutor's Office said there were no grounds for legal action against policemen who allegedly mistreated three Kurdish minors in detention in Van province. The young boys, identified as Ö.S., 14, Ş.Y., 16, and O.D., 17, were detained on February 15, 2019 for possessing harmful substances, resisting the police and affiliation with a terrorist organization. They were beaten during detention and had swelling, bruising and cuts on their bodies. Their injuries were documented in photographs and medical reports. [More..](#)

## **Students detained in ongoing Boğaziçi protests reveal torture, threats by Turkish police**

"We were detained around 4:30 p.m. and forced to wait in a bus until 5 a.m. The environment itself was [a kind of] torture. We were beaten a lot. My shoulders still hurt," İstanbul University student Elif Üçerli said. [More..](#)

## **Suspicious over alleged suicide of 17-year-old in jail grew as recording of his final hours was unretrievable**

A DVD containing recordings of the final hours of Kadir Aktar, a 17-year-old boy who allegedly committed suicide in jail, turned out to be damaged, increasing suspicions surrounding his death. [More..](#)

## **Former colonel reveals photo of tortured soldiers in mosque during July 15 attempted coup**

A former colonel tweeted a photo of soldiers in a mosque with apparent signs of maltreatment and torture taken shortly after a coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016. There have been widespread claims that soldiers who were taken to police centers, sports facilities and mosques after the coup was suppressed were subject to torture and ill-treatment. The photo is apparent confirmation of the allegations. [More..](#)

## **Man allegedly abducted by Turkish intel in İstanbul recounted details of torture**

Gökhan Güneş, who returned home nearly a week after he was allegedly abducted by Turkish intelligence officers in broad daylight in İstanbul, said he was tortured and subjected to threats during his enforced disappearance. [More..](#)



## **CCTV recordings at police station revealed brutal treatment of detainee**

Newly emerged CCTV recordings of a man who died in police custody on June 5 in İstanbul showed several policemen detaining him and one policeman emerging from his interrogation with a bloody hand. [More..](#)

## **Purged military officer revealed torture in police custody in Ankara**

A purged military officer who was detained in January in Ankara on alleged ties to the Gülen movement revealed torture and other ill-treatment in police custody. [More..](#)

## **Kurdish politician spoke of gross rights violations and torture in police detention center**

İbrahim Halil Baran, chairman of the Kurdistan Party (PAKURD), said he witnessed gross human rights violations and torture at a police detention center in Turkey's southeastern city of Şanlıurfa. [More..](#)

## **Turkish police sexually assaulted navy sergeant, threatened him with rape of his daughter**

A navy sergeant in an elite special forces unit testified in court about the torture he and his colleagues suffered at the hands of the Turkish police,

revealing some of the gruesome details of the abuse including sexual assault and threats to rape his wife and daughter. [More..](#)

### **CCTV recordings kept secret from the public revealed torture and abuse in Turkey**

CCTV recordings kept secret by the Turkish government confirmed the testimony of dozens of gendarmes who were subjected to torture and abuse in 2016 at the hands of thugs who were working for the police special forces. [More..](#)

### **Former teacher said torture by police common in Turkey's Afyon province**

"During my 10 days in detention, I could hear the screams of other detainees who were being tortured," said Servet Erdil when talking about the brutal torture and inhumane treatment he witnessed at Ankara police headquarters. [More..](#)

## 6. Transnational repression

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's long arm has reached tens of thousands of Turkish citizens abroad, from spying through diplomatic missions and pro-government diaspora organizations to denial of consular services and outright intimidation and illegal renditions.

Turkey's campaign has mostly relied on renditions, in which the government and its intelligence agency (MIT) persuade the targeted states to hand over individuals without due process. In some countries, Erdoğan critics were abducted and forcibly returned by MIT with the help of locals.

In 2021 Erdoğan continued to relentlessly pursue anyone with alleged links with the Gülen movement. They have been targets of hate speech, hate crimes, unlawful prosecution, torture and abduction, among other serious human rights violations.

Turkey has become number one among countries that have conducted renditions from host states. According to a Freedom House report on global transnational repression, Ankara's campaign primarily targets people affiliated with the movement, but the efforts of the government have recently expanded to include Kurds and leftists.

According to official statements by its interior ministry, Turkey has sent 800 extradition requests to 105 countries in the last four years, and more than 110 alleged members of the Gülen movement have been brought back to Turkey as part of the government's global campaign.

During the year the Turkish government did not hesitate to refer to extrajudicial and illegal methods as part of its propaganda, with Erdoğan mentioning the forcible return of Turkish nationals in his speeches as part of the country's counterterrorism success.

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### ***Abduction, Rendition and Forcible Return of Erdoğan Critics***

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#### **Kenya**

President Erdoğan revealed in televised remarks on May 19, 2021 that they had recently apprehended an important member of the Gülen movement, adding that he would soon announce that person's identity. Hours after Erdoğan's revelation, Seriyye Gülen released a video on YouTube in which she said her husband, Selahattin Gülen, a teacher, went missing on May 3 in

Kenya, where he had been living for the past seven months. [More ...](#)

Seriyye Gülen claimed that that her husband was kidnapped solely due to being a relative of Fethullah Gülen, calling on authorities to find Selahattin Gülen and release him immediately.

On May 6, 2021 a Kiambu court ruled that he not be arrested, extradited or deported, and the Kenyan interior secretary and inspector general of police were ordered to appear before the court to explain the whereabouts of Selahaddin Gülen. [More ...](#)

The pro-Turkish government media on May 31, 2021 confirmed the operation and his forcible transfer to Turkey. The Anadolu news agency reported that Selahattin Gülen was brought back to Turkey by MIT agents, quoting unnamed security sources. The agency published a photograph of the detainee in handcuffs with a Turkish flag on either side but did not say whether the MIT operation took place with the coordination of the host country. [More ...](#)

## **Kyrgyzstan**



Orhan İnandı is the latest victim in a series of cases in which Turkey's intelligence service was involved in unlawfully transferring people to Turkey from countries around the world. İnandı, who was the founder and director of the prestigious Sapat school network operating in Kyrgyzstan, went missing on May 31 and was feared to have been abducted by MIT due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement. [More ...](#)

However, President Erdoğan had acknowledged in a statement following a Cabinet meeting on July 5 that İnandı was actually rendered to Turkey by MIT, lauding the Turkish spies' efforts in the rendition. [More ...](#)

Photos of İnandı in handcuffs with Turkish flags prompted allegations of torture due to İnandı's visible weight loss and swollen right hand. [More ...](#)

An Ankara court on July 12 ruled to arrest İnandı on charges of serving as an executive of a terrorist organization. [More...](#)

His wife Reyhan İnandı said in a tweet that her husband was tortured and his right arm broken in three places by Turkish security officers. According to his wife, Orhan İnandı had not received timely medical treatment and as a result was unable to use his right arm. [More...](#)

Human Rights Watch released a statement on July 7 following President Erdoğan's announcement about İnandı, saying that the abduction, forcible disappearance and extrajudicial transfer of educator İnandı to Turkey by Turkish and Kyrgyz authorities amounted to egregious violations of international and domestic law. [More...](#)

### **Teachers working at schools linked to Gülen movement were deported to Turkey from Ukraine**

Two Turkish teachers, Salih Fidan and Samet Güre, who were detained in the Ukrainian city of Rava-Ruska on New Year's Day, were deported to Turkey by Ukrainian authorities despite anger on social media against their potential removal.

They had traveled to Kyiv 51 days earlier to make their way to Europe to seek asylum because their Turkish passports were about to expire and they feared Turkish authorities would not renew them. [More...](#)

### **Turkey sought extradition of dissidents living abroad**



Muaz Türkyılmaz, a Turkish businessman who was arrested at the airport as he was leaving Panama, faced extradition to Turkey. The Turkish Embassy in Panama City intensified its démarches for the extradition of Türkyılmaz on trumped-up terrorism charges due to his alleged ties to the Gülen movement.

Türkyılmaz was accused by Turkish authorities of downloading the ByLock smart phone application, which was available on Apple's App Store and Google Play, depositing money in a now-closed Gülen-linked bank and donating to the now-shuttered Kimse Yok Mu charity. [More...](#)

The Turkish government ramped up its efforts to file an extradition request for dissident academic and journalist Mahmut Akpınar, who took shelter in the United Kingdom to escape fabricated charges of terrorism. [More...](#)

## Kosovo indicted individuals involved in illegal deportation of Turkish teachers in 2018

Kosovar authorities indicted three individuals involved in the illegal deportation of six Turkish teachers to Turkey on March 29, 2018. The three are Driton Gashi, former head of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency; Valon Krasniqi, director of the Department of Citizenship and Migration at the Interior Ministry; and Rahman Sylejmani, head of the Directorate of Migration and Foreigners at the Kosovo Border Police. [More ...](#)

## Freedom House report showed extent of Turkey's policy of transnational repression

A report by Freedom House on global transnational repression revealed the intensity, geographic reach and suddenness of the Turkish government's campaign targeting dissidents abroad, noting that Turkey had become number one among countries that have conducted renditions from host states since 2014.

The report, titled "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," indicated that the Turkish government pursued its perceived enemies in at least 30 different host countries spread across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia since a coup attempt in July 2016. [More ...](#)

## SCF released reports and interviews on Turkey's practice of transnational repression

SCF released a report in October titled "Turkey's Transnational Repression: Abduction, Rendition and Forcible Return of Erdoğan Critics," a study that focused on how the Turkish government under President Erdoğan used extrajudicial and illegal methods for the forcible transfer to Turkey of its citizens abroad. [More ...](#)

Another SCF report released in August focused on how the Turkish government abused INTERPOL in a number of ways. The report shed light on such abusive practices by providing information on how INTERPOL mechanisms work and the way Turkey misused them in various cases. [More ...](#)

Transnational repression expert Dr. Edward Lemon said in an interview with SCF that Turkey was one of the countries that abused mechanisms of international organizations such as INTERPOL the most. "Turkey is the worst of the worst when it comes to transnational repression, which is evident from a



dataset compiled by Freedom House last year. In 2017 Turkey tried to put over 60,000 individuals on INTERPOL's wanted lists," he said. [More...](#)

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## ***Attacks and pressure on critics and journalists living abroad***

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### **Turkey froze assets of people and organizations on terror charges**



Turkey froze the assets of 377 individuals and institutions in April, including US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen and people with links to the worldwide civic initiative inspired by him, under Law No. 6415 on the Prevention of the Financing of Terrorism. The decision, published in the Official Gazette in April, was made by then-Treasury and Finance Minister Lütfi Elvan and also signed by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu. [More...](#)

In December the Turkish government froze the assets of 770 people including some journalists in exile and an organization on the grounds of terrorism financing in a ruling signed by Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati and Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu.

### **Pressure on journalists and their media outlets**

Bold Medya, a YouTube channel run by the German-based International Journalists Association eV (IJA), was shut down due to efforts exerted by the Turkish government. The IJA was set up by exiled Turkish journalists who had to flee Turkey to avoid persecution and incarceration. [More...](#)

Erk Acarer, a Turkish journalist who is critical of the Turkish government and has been living in exile in Germany, said he was attacked outside his home in Berlin by three men who reportedly warned him to stop writing. [More...](#)

### **Seizure of schools by the Maarif Foundation**

Ethiopia illegally transferred a school run by German investors to Turkey's state-run Maarif Foundation. Turkish authorities claimed the school was affiliated with the Gülen movement. [More...](#)



## **New York mosque funded by Turkish gov't refused to hold religious services**

The Brooklyn Eyup Sultan Mosque, which is funded and operated by Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet), denied religious services for deceased Turkish-American businessman Muharrem Atmaca due to his links to the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

## **German police told former MP he was on hit list targeting gov't critics in exile**

The German Federal Police warned Hasip Kaplan, a former lawmaker from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), of a planned assassination targeting him based on a hit list that included the names of 55 critics of the Turkish government living in exile. [More...](#)

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## ***Erdoğan's long arm and the global witch-hunt***

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## **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.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [confirmed](#) systematic spying on Turkish government critics on foreign soil by Turkish diplomatic missions. 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 released in 2021, alleged supporters of the Gülen movement were spied on by the Turkish diplomatic missions in [Hungary](#), [Mozambique](#), [Niger](#), [Jordan](#), [Gabon](#), [Turkmenistan](#), [Cameroon](#), [Nepal](#), [Angola](#), [Albania](#), [Argentina](#), [Singapore](#), [Indonesia](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Colombia](#), [Malawi](#), [the United Kingdom](#) and [the Philippines](#).

## **Germany investigated Turk over alleged spying on Gülen supporters**

German federal prosecutors said in October they were investigating a Turkish national on suspicion of spying on dissidents for MIT. [More...](#)

The suspect, identified as Ali D., was arrested in a Düsseldorf hotel on September 17 after an employee noticed a weapon on him, prosecutors said in a statement. A list of names of some Gülen movement followers was also seized in Ali D.'s hotel room, which included additional information on each person. [More...](#)

## **Turkey's attempts to abuse INTERPOL**

Speaking to journalists before the International Criminal Police Organization's general assembly held in Turkey in November, Turkey's Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said Turkey would use the INTERPOL General Assembly to persuade officials and delegates to take a stance against the Gülen movement. [More...](#)

Turkey will grow its presence at INTERPOL by increasing its number of liaison officers in the General Secretariat and nominating more candidates for senior positions within the organization, newly elected member of INTERPOL's Executive Committee Selçuk Sevgel said in an interview with the state-run Anadolu news agency. [More...](#)

## 7. Women's rights



The year 2021 witnessed an increase in rights violations against women in Turkey, with rising numbers of femicide cases and the March 10 withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe treaty designed to prevent violence and domestic abuse against women.

According to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu), 280 women were murdered in 2021. Among them, 124 were killed by their husbands, 37 by their boyfriends and 21 by their former husbands. Only 11 of the women were not killed by a man closely related to them. The number of suspicious deaths has also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amid calls from women's rights organizations and world leaders, such as US President Joe Biden, for the reinstatement of the Istanbul Convention, the Council of State, Turkey's highest administrative court, rejected appeals requesting the cancellation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's executive decree withdrawing Turkey from the convention.

Here is some of the most important news from 2021 in the field of women's rights:

### **Turkey pulled out of landmark treaty protecting women from violence**

Turkey pulled out of the world's first binding treaty to prevent and combat violence against women by presidential decree in March.

The 2011 Istanbul Convention, signed by 45 countries and the European Union, requires governments to adopt legislation prosecuting domestic violence and similar abuse as well as marital rape and female genital mutilation. Conservatives had claimed the charter damages family unity, encourages divorce and that its references to equality were being used by the LGBT community to gain broader acceptance in society. [More...](#)

## **International community and organizations reacted negatively to Turkey's withdrawal from Istanbul Convention**

World leaders, international and regional organizations and right groups reacted negatively to Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's (CoE) binding treaty to prevent and combat violence against women. [More...](#)

## **Turkey set clock back 10 years on women's rights: Amnesty International**

Turkey set the clock back 10 years on women's rights by withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention and has also set a "terrifying precedent," said Amnesty International. Agnes Callamard, secretary-general of Amnesty International, said the withdrawal "sends a reckless and dangerous message to perpetrators who abuse, maim and kill that they can carry on doing so with impunity." [More...](#)

## **Minister criticized for claiming 'tolerable level' of domestic violence during pandemic**

Turkey's Minister of Family and Social Services Derya Yanık attracted widespread criticism due to remarks suggesting that Turkey has experienced "tolerable levels" of domestic violence during the coronavirus pandemic. The minister said the pandemic led to an increase in cases of domestic violence in the beginning, adding, "While there were 19,582 cases [of domestic violence] in January 2020, this number rose to a tolerable level in the February-March period and showed a significant drop in April 2020." [More...](#)



## **AKP politician lambasted for again claiming Gülen-linked women conceive in conjugal rooms**

Özlem Zengin, a senior official from Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), came under fire once again due to remarks claiming that women who were jailed as part of a government-led crackdown on the Gülen movement deliberately conceive in conjugal rooms to create the perception that women in Turkey are jailed with their babies. [More...](#)

## **Turkey's top court ruled gross negligence on part of authorities in femicide case**

The Turkish Constitutional Court ruled that authorities had not taken the necessary precautions to protect a woman identified as S.E., although she had filed several complaints against her husband.

"S.E. was a victim of gross negligence, as the authorities did not do everything in their power to keep her husband away or follow up on complaints. S.E.'s

death is not the result of a simple mistake. This decision will be important in preventing other deaths as a result of the authorities' incompetence," the decision said. [More...](#)

#### **44 women journalists subjected to police violence, 13 detained in 2021**

Violence against female journalists increased in Turkey, with 44 female journalists subjected to police violence and 13 detained while covering events in the field in the first half of 2021, said the Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ). According to CFWIJ violence against female journalists increased by 158.82 percent in 2021 in comparison to the same period of 2020. [More...](#)



#### **Ex-soldier walked free after sentence suspended in rape case**

In the sixth and final hearing of his trial, former soldier Musa Orhan was given a suspended sentence of 10 years by the Siirt 1st High Criminal Court on conviction of sexual assault. Orhan was accused of raping İpek Er, an 18-year-old Kurdish woman who later died by suicide. [More...](#)

#### **'Murder every day': Turkish women fearful after treaty exit**

Turkish women began to feel more vulnerable and legally unprotected after Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in March. And though there had been no detectible surge in violence, rights advocates said there had been a jump in unexplained deaths. [More...](#)

#### **Uyghur women marched from İstanbul to Ankara, demanding Turkey help find their children in China**

A group of Uyghur women in Turkey marched from İstanbul to Ankara demanding that the Turkish government help locate their children, whom they were forced to leave behind in China.

Most of the children reportedly had to be left behind as a result of China's population policies. The protesting women said they needed the help of the Turkish government to locate their children and to navigate the Chinese bureaucracy. However, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been reluctant to engage with China concerning the Uyghurs, because Turkey is dependent on Chinese investment and for a supply of COVID-19 vaccines. [More...](#)

#### **793 women subjected to rape, sexual harassment in custody in Turkey since 1997: report**

According to a report by the Legal Aid Bureau against Sexual Harassment and Rape in Custody, which provides free legal support for women subjected to

rape or sexual harassment during detention in Turkey, a total of 793 women had applied for assistance since the bureau was founded in 1997. [More...](#)

### **Study revealed 60 percent of Turks witnessed violence against women**

A report titled “The changing family structure in Turkey” and released by Istanbul Commerce University said almost 60 percent of Turks have witnessed violence against women in their immediate environment. [More...](#)

### **Female worker revealed inhumane working conditions at Dardanel fish company**

A female worker revealed inhumane working conditions at Turkey’s Dardanel fish company, sparking outrage among unions and activists. The worker said they were treated in an undignified manner and were humiliated and belittled by their superiors. [More...](#)

### **Woman faced detention over alleged Gülen links immediately after giving birth: report**

A woman who gave birth in the early hours of the new year in the Turkish capital of Ankara faced detention due to her alleged links to the Gülen movement. “My sister delivered a baby at the Ankara Keçiören Medical Park Hospital tonight. Her name is Hacer Yıldırım. The baby is in intensive care because of amniotic fluid in the lungs. Police officers are waiting at the door to detain her,” Yıldırım’s brother Ramazan Gözel tweeted. [More...](#)

### **Turkish authorities issued detention warrant for police officer accused of unlawful strip-search**

Female police officer Songül Eken Kılıç was detained for conducting an unlawful strip-search of architect Mücella Yapıcı when she was detained during the Gezi protests of 2013. Yapıcı filed a complaint saying she was mistreated and subjected to harassment in detention, alleging that she was made to strip naked and squat. Strip-searches have frequently been used by Turkish security forces against people suspected or convicted of political crimes. [More...](#)

### **Top court issued landmark ruling to investigate gov’t officials for negligence in femicide case**

Turkey’s Constitutional Court issued a landmark decision in the case of government officials accused of negligence in the murder of academic Serpil Erfindik, who was killed by her husband on December 15, 2013, ruling to relaunch the investigation into them. The top court stated in its first decision holding government officials responsible for a femicide that the officials had violated Erfindik’s right to life by failing to effectively implement protective and preventive measures against violence against women in Turkey. [More...](#)

## **I wish I would die, pregnant inmate mistreated in prison said in voice recording**

Arzu Nur Özkan, an eight-months-pregnant former teacher, said the mistreatment she endured in prison made her wish she could die. Özkan said she was mocked by prison doctors and that her multiple health problems were not taken seriously. [More...](#)

## **Women's rights activists demanded reinstatement of Istanbul Convention after 2 more femicides**



Women's rights activists demanded reinstatement of the Istanbul Convention, an international treaty to combat violence against women, after two more women were killed on the same day. The number of known femicides had reached 296 by October 2021. [More...](#)

## **Pandemic could be increasing underage marriages among migrants: Save the Children**

According to a report published by the UK-based charity Save the Children, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased poverty, which could lead to an increase in underage marriages among migrants in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The report said revisions to Turkey's civil law had also caused an increase in such marriages. [More...](#)

## **Majority of poor women in Turkey only able to perform unpaid labor at home**

According to a report titled "The COVID-19 Pandemic and Poverty," women in Turkey are often only able to perform unpaid labor at home rather than hold outside jobs and as a result suffer the most from poverty.

The pandemic has not only increased poverty among women but also increased their work, the author of the report said, adding that there has been a 9.1 percent increase in poverty among women in Turkey and that single mothers in particular suffer from the effects of poverty. [More...](#)

## **Brother of young woman found dead in AKP deputy's home demanded justice**

The brother of Nadira Kadirova, a young woman from Uzbekistan who was found dead in the home of ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputy Şirin Ünal, called on Turkish authorities to effectively investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of his sister. Muhammed Ali

Kadirov [said](#) they had appealed to the Constitutional Court 10 months ago to restart the investigation into Kadirova's death, which had been ruled a suicide by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. Kadirov said the court had yet to make a decision. [More...](#)

### **AKP deputy said women also to blame for male violence and femicide**

Hülya Atçı Nergis, a deputy from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), said in a controversial remark that women also bear some guilt for violence perpetrated by men. "Women raise the men who eventually go on to kill other women," she said on a local television program. "Men are the ones who are always blamed, but in this regard, don't women have any fault?" she said. Nergis had also said in early March that more men were killed than women. [More...](#)

### **Female student subjected to unlawful strip-search filed complaint amid government's persistent denial**

A female student who was subjected to an unlawful strip-search in detention filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office after top government officials denied that strip-searches were taking place in Turkish prisons.

According to the testimony of the student, who was not named, the incident took place in Uşak Prison on August 31, 2020. She claimed she was made to take off all her clothes, and when she resisted taking off her underwear, she was yelled at by the prison guards. [More...](#)

### **Sex crime convictions increased 10-fold in Turkey in 10 years: report**

The number of people convicted of sex crimes in Turkey saw a sharp increase from 562 in 2009 to 5,800 in 2019, a 10-fold increase in 10 years, according to data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). [More...](#)