

FACT SHEET: HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN TURKEY FACE OPPRESSION, OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

1 March - 31 August 2021


Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT) is an internationally recognized human rights organization that has provided treatment and rehabilitation services to torture survivors and their relatives in Turkey since it was established in 1990 and worked to prevent other human rights violations by focusing on torture.


HRFT has prepared this fact sheet to make the increasing human rights violations and the excessive pressure and obstacles exerted on human rights defenders visible and strengthen international solidarity.


Human Rights Defenders in Turkey, particularly LGBTI+ rights and women rights defenders and the defenders of the religious and ethnic minorities rights, unionists, environmental activists, lawyers, and journalists, have been under the government's pressure. The HRDs, subjected to judicial harassment and various attacks, including surveillance and prosecution, are frequently falsely accused of crimes under the Anti-Terror Law, Law on Meetings and Demonstrations and Turkish Penal Code such as "insulting the Turkish President". Through prolonged arbitrary detention, arrest, torture, and criminal prosecution, the activities of HRDs are hindered.


In particular, the measures were taken due to the pandemic often involve arbitrary interventions that restrict human rights and freedoms, including prisons. Human rights and liberties guaranteed by the Turkish Constitution and the international conventions, to which Turkey is a party, are unlawfully restricted by decrees and circulars. Human rights defenders who have opposed those violations are faced with ever-increasing pressure. The Emergency Decrees, of which validity period has been recently extended, has exacerbated this situation.


According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey Documentation Centre's data¹, between March and August 2021:


 **Ban on Assemblies & Demonstrations**
A total of a 729-day ban on assemblies and demonstrations were imposed in 19 provinces² and 3 districts³. In a district⁴, an indefinite ban was enforced.


 **Detention**
1,098 HRDs⁵, including 119 women and LGBTI+ rights defenders and 14 environmental activists, were taken into custody.


 **Arrests & Judicial Control Measures**
107 HRDs were sentenced to various judicial control measures, while 33 were arrested.

 **Police Interventions & Prohibitions**
The police intervened in at least 124 assemblies and demonstrations, including 23 on women's and LGBTI+ rights, 21 on union rights and 11 on environmental rights. The number of prohibited events was 21.

 **The Curfews**
Indefinite curfews were declared in 80 villages of 2 districts.

 **Fines**
290 HRDs were fined 909,598 Turkish liras on the grounds of the violation of Covid-19 measures for participating in demonstrations.

 **Trial**
55 hearings were held in which 338 HRDs were tried, including more than 20 lawyers, 87 women and LGBTI+ rights defenders and 7 environmental activists.

 **Prosecution against Bar Associations and Lawyers**
Criminal prosecution was launched against the Izmir Bar Association and Diyarbakir Bar Association's executive councils for their statements regarding LGBTI+ rights.
Criminal prosecutions were launched against 26 HRDs, 18 of whom were lawyers.

¹ In this document, HRFT adopts the HRD definition of the UN's Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (A/RES/53/144). Therefore, although HRFT's Documentation Centre's approach in this regard is the same, since it publishes violations under different human right categories in its annual human rights report, the numbers could vary.

² Hakkâri, Şirnak, Van, Batman, Tunceli, Urfa, Muş, Siirt, Mardin, Denizli, Kocaeli, Edirne, Aydın, Trabzon, İstanbul, Rize, İzmir, Osmaniye, Ağrı.

³ Beykoz, İskenderun, Kartal.

⁴ Kadıköy.

⁵ A number of human rights defenders were detained more than once. The number here represents the total number of detentions.