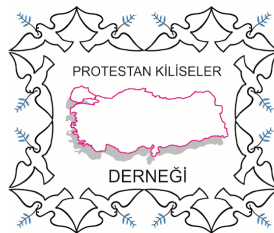


2024 Human Rights Violation Report

Prepared by
Association of Protestant Churches

14.06.2025



Introduction, Background and Summary

We respectfully submit the 2024 Human Rights Violation Report to the public. Such reports have been prepared annually for many years from the perspective of the Protestant Community in Turkey.

This report contains the following key sections:

- A summary of current historical and sociological information to assist those unfamiliar with Protestants in Turkey
- The purpose of this report
- Summary information concerning the areas examined by the report
- More detailed information concerning the areas focused on by the report
- Recommendations

Background

The Protestant community in Turkey is made up of approximately 214 churches/fellowships of various sizes, the majority of which are found in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. ¹

152 of these Protestant fellowships have obtained legal entity status through the establishment of 21 religious foundations, 27 representative branches of religious foundations, 36 church associations and 68 representative branches linked to those associations. The remaining fellowships do not possess legal entity status.

Of the 214 Protestant fellowships, 12 worship in historical church buildings, 123 have rented facilities that are open to the public and 57 meet in premises they own. 22 fellowships meet together in their own homes for worship.²

In 2024, the Protestant community was not given the opportunity to train its own religious personnel within the Turkish National Education system. Therefore, the Protestant community trains most of its religious leaders through its own internal apprenticeship method. A small percentage study at theological schools overseas. Some are able to gain the necessary knowledge and skills for pastoral leadership through seminars organized in-country. In recent years the number of national Protestant religious workers has increased. But as there have not been enough national leaders to meet the need, some churches continue to meet their need for spiritual guidance through foreign pastors (Protestant spiritual leaders). However, since 2019 the severe restrictions on foreign religious workers by requiring them to leave the country either due to the issuance of N-82 or G-87 codes³ banning entry into Turkey or the denial of residence visas, has caused and continues to cause severe difficulties for Protestant fellowships that relied on a foreign pastor for spiritual guidance.

¹ This figure covers fellowships where the language used for worship is Turkish. While the exact number is not known, it is estimated that there are approximately another 100 Protestant fellowships in Turkey that worship in other languages, the majority of these are formed by refugees from Iran.

² "House fellowships" means the members of a fellowship meeting together regularly in their own homes without any public presence.

³ N-82: (Entry conditional on pre-approval) According to article 9/7 of Law number 6458 Foreigners and International Security some foreigners with entry bans can enter the country if they have prior approval.

G-87: Foreigners considered to be a threat to security

Protestant churches do not have a hierarchical or centralized structure. Each church or group of churches is independent. However, church pastors began meeting together in the late 1980's for the purpose of unity, solidarity and partnership between Protestant churches. In the mid 1990's this unity gained structural momentum, so they formed "The Alliance of Protestant Churches", known as TeK (Representative Committee). Earlier laws relating to the formation of associations prevented TeK from being a representative body before official government bodies. As the result of a change in the Law of Associations, TeK decided to establish an association and the Association of Protestant Churches was formed on Jan 23, 2009. The Association of Protestant Churches continues to act as the representative and unifying body for a large part of the Protestant community in Turkey.

Since 2007 the Association of Protestant Churches has published these monitoring reports⁴ which set out the situation faced by the Protestant community. The Association of Protestant Churches attaches great importance to freedom of religion and belief and strives to ensure these freedoms become a reality for everyone, everywhere. These annual monitoring reports serve this aim as they present the Protestant community's situation to public officials, civil society and the media.

Summary

Freedom of religion and belief, one of the basic human rights listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is granted in our country through international human rights law, the Constitution and national law. Whilst generally there is freedom of religion in our country, the Protestant community still faced some basic problems in 2024 in spite of the existing legal protections. In the spirit of contributing to the development of freedom of belief in Turkey, this report has been prepared to present some of the problems as well as positive developments relating to religious freedom that have been experienced in 2024 by the Protestant community.⁵ The situation in the year 2024 is briefly summarized below:

- Protestant Christian individuals or institutions experienced hate crimes or associated physical attacks due solely to their faith
- 2024 saw an increase from the previous year in both written and oral hate speech aimed at provoking hate in public opinion, both written and verbal, that was directed at Protestant Christian individuals or institutions
- In 2024, problems continued to be faced regarding requests to establish a place of worship, to continue using a facility for worship, or with applications to use existing church buildings. Rents have been subject to abnormal inflationary increases throughout the country; this problem is further exacerbated due to even higher rents being charged when it is known the proposed renter is a church.
- In 2024, the trend for churches to gain legal status through the establishment of a religious foundation, or by becoming a representative of an already existing foundation, continued to increase.

⁴ Before 2009 the phrase "Union" ("Birlik") was used http://www.protestankiliseler.org/?page_id=638

⁵ Our society defends freedom of belief for everyone. This includes the right not to believe.

- Due to high levels of inflation in 2024 all of society felt the negative financial effects of falling purchasing power; the Protestant community was deeply affected by this.
- No progress was made in 2024 regarding the rights of Christians to train their own religious workers. Many foreign church leaders were deported, were denied entry to Turkey or faced problems with getting their residence permits renewed.
- During 2024, Christian religious workers continued to be unrecognized as a profession by local authorities and official bodies.
- In 2024, no progress was made towards solving the problem of the lack of a cemetery for Christian citizens. Christian citizens who die are buried in the “non-Muslim” section of a cemetery because there is no ground consecrated for Christians.

Hate Crimes and Hate Speech, Verbal and Physical Attacks

2024 saw an increase from the previous year in terms of hate speech and hate crimes.

- On 20 January, shots were fired at Eskişehir Salvation Church at night when no one was in the building. The bullets hit a dentist's clinic that was below the church; police who attended the scene did not retrieve the bullet casing, nor did they file a report. The crime was not recorded and there was no follow-up investigation. As a result of the church's case application to the prosecutor's office, a decision not to pursue prosecution was made. The church then applied to a higher court.
- On 12 March, following Easter celebrations, a partially burnt New Testament was left outside a church in Kuşadası.
- On 8 June the Constitutional Court ruled that there was no legal basis to precede in the case concerning “the restriction of their religious rights” brought by 9 foreign Christians who had been given the N-82 code and had their residence permissions cancelled. The names of these 9 Christians were published by the court, which led to their being accused by many media outlets of being “missionaries” and enemies of the state; many instances of hate speech against them were widely shared. In particular, many social media comments called for the death penalty against these Christians or commented that it was a religious duty to kill them.
- On 2 July the building used by the Kayseri Church as a laundromat and food distribution center serving refugees was physically attacked.
- On 28 July two people attempted to forcibly open the door of Bahçelievler Grace Church. When they were unsuccessful in their attempt, they repeatedly attacked the church's sign and caused damage. Neighbors called the police, and it is understood that there were attempts to find the perpetrators.
- On 13 November the Pastor of Van Salvation Church attempted to submit a written request for the daughter of one of the Iranian members of his congregation to be exempt from religious lessons at school. The School Director rejected this request because the child is not a Turkish citizen and requested documentation to prove that the child is Christian.

- On 28 November 2 people approached the bookstand outside İzmir Karşıyaka Salvation Church and insulted the church members who were serving there. They asked, "Why don't the local people murder you?"
- On 9 December a church member was fired from their job as an English teacher in a private evening class school linked to the Malatya Board of Education, with no reason given. A director of the school warned her, "Be careful which associations you attend and the foreigners you make friends with." The teacher protested to the Board of Education and the security authorities, but her requests went unheeded. She did not open a court case for unfair dismissal because she is concerned about the possible repercussions for her older sister who is a civil servant.
- On 29 December, a short while after the Suruç Church had celebrated Christmas, a person targeted the church's pastor with the following hate speech: "... enough is enough, may God give the priest who opened a church in Suruç what he deserveswe expect the government authorities to act immediately in this matter." This individual later called the pastor to apologize. An official complaint was made to the prosecutor, but there have been no developments in the case.
- On 29 December security forces entered Karşıyaka Salvation Church while the worship service was underway and carried out identification checks on all the church members and guests present; thereby disrupting their worship.
- On 31 December an armed attack was carried out on the Salvation Church association building in Çekmeköy. The assailant fired a number of shots from a car and attempted to remove the church's signs. It was noted that the same individual also reacted against citizens who were celebrating the New Year and said, "We will not allow you to brainwash our Muslim youth! Oh infidels, you will be defeated and swept up into hell." When a reporter later asked the individual why he had done this, his reply was, "Because I felt like it."
- The members of the Eastern Black Sea Salvation Church were subjected to hate speech on different occasions, whether they were sharing their faith at the time or not: a few people attempted to stop them from sharing their faith in a café, people found it hard to locate the church building, the child of a church member who is married to a Muslim was told at school, "Your father is a Muslim, so you are a Muslim.", several church members faced difficulties in their work-places due to their faith – some of these had to leave their jobs while others left the church, and some foreign church members received the N82 code.
- Didim Light Church wanted to distribute brochures advertising the church. They applied for the necessary permissions to the district governorship, the local authority and the police but all of these applications were rejected.
- The Antalya Bible Church was refused permission to distribute invitations to their public Easter and Christmas celebrations multiple times by the local authorities. They also received threatening telephone calls and messages from many people.

- In the course of his work at a bookshop in Suruç, the Pastor of the Suruç Church regularly faced questions such as “Are you a missionary?” and “You are trying to make people change their religion.” Threatening comments he received on social media were along the lines of “May God punish you, this is a Muslim city, how dare you celebrate Christmas here, you cannot brainwash anyone, are you not afraid about having to give an account to God.”
- Police approached at least two members of the Malatya Church and asked them to become informants. They were advised “this is to ensure your safety.” One of these people was offered a substantial sum of money, and was told, “We need someone we can trust on the inside.” They also sought to scare this individual by sharing some information about the church with them to give the impression that the church was being watched.
- The Lüleburgaz representative office of the Salvation Churches Association first faced problems concerning its sign, then a campaign of signatures attempted to close it down, finally the local governorship opened a court case to close the representative office due to its religious activities. Because this court case could threaten the survival of all the other Salvation Churches, this representative office was closed and the court case lapsed.
- The Kütahya Church was forced to leave its current premises. No landlord in town was prepared to rent to a church. One realtor asked the church’s representative to leave his offices, saying “I am a Muslim. It would not be right for me to find you a location. Your very existence is a threat.” The church is still struggling to find a place to meet.

Problems Regarding Places of Worship

The right to establish and maintain a place of worship is an important aspect of the freedom of religion and belief.

Because members of the Protestant community are mostly new Christians, they do not have religious buildings that are part of their cultural and religious heritage like traditional Christian communities have in Turkey. There are very few historical church buildings which are available for use. Therefore, a large portion of the Protestant community tries to overcome the problem of finding a place to worship by establishing an association or religious foundation or gaining representative status with an existing association or religious foundation and then renting or purchasing a property such as a stand-alone building, shop or depot that has not traditionally been used for worship. A very small number of congregations have been able to build their own free-standing buildings. However, many of these premises do not have official status as a place of worship and therefore they are not officially recognized as a place of worship even though they are used in this way. These congregations cannot benefit from the advantages or the assistance given to an officially recognized place of worship such as free electricity and water as well as tax exemption. When they introduce themselves to the authorities as a church, they receive warnings that they are not legal and may be closed down, as can be seen in the example of the Lüleburgaz representative office of the Salvation Churches Association, as described above.

The range of places of worship used by the Protestant community as at the end of 2024 is as follows:

The known number of Protestant congregations in all of Turkey is 214. An analysis of their use of worship sites is:

- Congregations with their own stand alone or independent building (in the name of an individual or legal entity) - 27.
- Congregations who worship in their own building that is not stand alone or independent (in the name of an individual or a legal entity) - 30.
- Those who worship in a traditional historical church - 12.
- Those who worship in a rented facility - 123.
- Those who worship in a home - 22.

From these statistics, it is clear how important the issue of having a place of worship is for the Protestant community, and how insecure the current situation is due to the number of rental properties and home fellowships.

The steadily growing Protestant community continued to face a serious problem in 2024 regarding the issue of places to worship. In smaller communities where there has not been a Christian presence in the recent past or where there is no Christian place of worship, members of Protestant congregations are confronted with severe and very visible social pressure. Instead of public institutions adding to this pressure, it would better serve the state's basic responsibilities relating to human rights for these institutions to take the role of protector and ease the burden of these small Christian congregations

The Right to Propagate Religion

The details of various violations of the right to propagate religion that occurred in 2024 are to be found on pages 4-6 in the section entitled "Hate Crimes and Hate Speech, Verbal and Physical Attacks."

Problems Faced in Education and Compulsory Religious Classes

In 2024, apart from the case concerning Van Salvation Church on 13 November, there were no other violations reported to us concerning the Religious Culture and Moral Education Class (DKAB) and the right to exemption from this class. Despite the fact that this lesson has been found to be in contravention of the right to freedom of religion and the requirements to provide a laic and scientific education by local courts and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), with court rulings for this class to be removed, it continues to be taught.⁶ The content of the mandatory Religious Culture and Moral Education classes and the resources used in the classroom are currently far from being pluralistic. The sections relating to Christianity are presented from an Islamic perspective and do not represent the views of Christians themselves.

Some Christian students and their families have faced significant difficulties because students are required to select at least three optional classes. One of these optional classes covers the Islamic faith, and despite it being optional, if no alternative is offered students

⁶ <https://www.hukukihaber.net/egitim/mahkeme-zorunlu-din-dersinden-muafiyet-sartini-hukuka-aykiri-buldu-h344451.html>

have to take it to meet the required minimum. Although this problem can often be solved by dialogue with the school, this process is stressful and exhausting for the students and their families.

The Problem of Being Unable to Train Religious Leaders and Difficulties Faced by Foreign Protestants

In 2024, the laws in Turkey continued to block the possibility of training Christian clergy and the opening of schools to provide religious education for the members of church communities in any way. Yet the right to train and develop religious leaders is one of the foundational pillars of the freedom of religion and belief. The Protestant community presently solves this issue by providing apprentice training, giving seminars within Turkey, sending students abroad or utilizing the support of foreign clergy.

In 2024, although spiritual leadership for the majority of congregations was offered by local Christians, there is still a need for foreign religious workers. In 2024, we continued to see cases of foreign religious workers and members of congregations being deported, or refused entry to Turkey or denied residence permits and visas. Many congregations were left in a difficult situation and there continues to be a great need for religious workers.

The number of Protestants reported to us as having received an entry ban code:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
USA	15	10	3		22	12	62
UK	5	1			1		7
South Korea	4	3	1		4	5	17
Germany	3	4	1		1	2	11
Other European	2	4	2		1	0	9
Latin America	2	3	0		0	0	5
Rest of the World	4	5	4	2	4	2	21
Total	35	30	11	2	33	21	132

The number of those affected (not receiving a code but those who need to leave Turkey to keep the family together):

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Coded individuals	35	30	11	2	33	21	132
Spouses	24	12	5	0	5	6	52
Children (under 18)	28	31	7	0	25	28	119
Toplam	87	73	23	2	63	55	303

As can be seen from these tables, the already small Protestant community is seriously threatened by this negative development.

Most of these people have settled in our country for many years and live here with their families. These people have no criminal record, investigation or court documents concerning them. This situation has exposed a huge humanitarian problem. Having someone from a family receive an unexpected entry ban shatters family unity and leaves everyone in the family facing a chaotic situation.⁷

Nearly all these individuals received an N-82 code (which links entry to Turkey to a process of prior approval). When the authorities who issued these codes give their explanation to the court, they state that the N-82 restriction is not an entry ban, it is simply a requirement to obtain prior approval. However, in practice, all of those who have been coded and subsequently applied for a visa have had those applications rejected. Although the N-82 is not an entry ban de jure it is a de facto entry ban in Turkey.

It had been believed that the N-82 code was an entry ban valid for 5 years, however some who obtained the code 5 years ago attempted to re-enter Turkey as a tourist and were turned back because they had a code on their record. We consider that these possible lifetime bans for those who have spent an important part of their lives in our country is both illegal and unconscionable.

A small number of those deported or banned from entry received the G-87 code (people who are thought to pose a general security threat). In other countries this code is used for those who participate in armed activities, terrorist organizations or people who participate demonstrations. It has deeply wounded us and the code recipients that in our country this code is being given without any evidence to members of the Protestant community who are focused on living their faith, who are opposed to violence and who do not have criminal records. These people have been given entry bans for at least 5 years.

In court cases opened to challenge this situation, the authorities have claimed that these people are pursuing activities to the detriment of Turkey, have taken part in missionary activities and that some of them had attended our Family Conference (which our Association has held annually for twenty years) or other seminars and meetings that are similarly completely legal and transparent. Some of the court cases have reached a conclusion and a verdict was delivered against those receiving the code without any concrete reason, proof, information or document being given. A few cases have produced positive results. However, in these cases the administrators insisted on not implementing the court decisions to revoke the code or grant the visa/residence permit. Although such arbitrary practices within the bureaucracy destroyed people's hopes, their litigation process has started again. Where the coded person is a foreigner married to a Turkish citizen, they often win their court case and a renewed residence permit is granted, however a family who won their court case found that the authorities cancelled the foreign spouse's newly issued residence permit. This illegal situation is on-going, and the family has appealed to the Constitutional Court. Some of those cases before the Constitutional Court have also resulted in negative decisions and application has been made to the European High Court of Human Rights. Our hope is that these cases which have no legal standing and are in violation of human rights will find justice in the Constitutional Court.

⁷ Personal details of the individuals concerned have been withheld so as not to negatively affect their court cases.

Our Association respects our country's sovereign rights, that is, the right to decide who can and cannot be within the country's borders, but at the same time we view this policy as a grave violation of rights and discriminatory since it is being applied solely because these people are Christian.

In addition, foreign members of the Protestant community live with the worry that they could be deported at any time. Rather than subject themselves and their families to this chaos and stress, some individuals or families have chosen not to participate in church meetings and activities or have left our country voluntarily. But because there are no accurate records kept concerning those who have left in this way we have not included data on these cases in this report.

Legal Entity / Right to Organize

The lack of Legal Entity is a problem for all religious groups in Turkey, but especially for religious minorities. The Protestant community has tried to solve this issue by establishing associations and religious foundations or becoming a representative of an existing association or foundation.

As of 2024, members of the Protestant church community have established 21 religious foundations, 27 representative branches of foundations, 36 church associations and over 68 representative branches connected to these associations, giving legal entity status to 152 fellowships. The remaining fellowships do not possess any form of legal entity. The trend towards gaining legal entity continues. However, associations and foundations are not accepted officially as a "church" or a "place of worship." The problem of a religious congregation becoming a legal entity has not been completely solved. The present legal path does not allow for a congregation to obtain a legal identity as a "religious congregation." In addition, for small churches, the present path to "forming an association" appears complex and hard to implement. Furthermore, the cost of establishing a foundation is very high and the legal procedure is long, making it hard for small fellowships to gain legal entity status. Small Protestant congregations try to resolve this problem through becoming a representative branch of an existing church association or religious foundation.

The trend seen in recent years for churches to become religious foundations continued in 2023.

Obligatory Declaration of Faith

In 2024 we received no report of this right being violated.

The requirement to declare one's faith to be exempt from Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge classes, or even to prove this faith, continues to be a violation of human rights. Decisions taken by the European High Court of Human Rights Court and local courts need to be implemented for this problem to be solved.⁸

Media

One of the significant problems facing the Protestant community is the increase of hate speech as a result of the increased use of social media in society. We encounter hate

⁸ <https://www.hukukihaber.net/egitim/mahkeme-zorunlu-din-dersinden-muafiyet-sartini-hukuka-aykiri-buldu-h344451.html>

speech filled with insult and profanity directed at official church social media accounts, church leaders, Christianity, Christian values and Christians in general; these often originate from the activity of social media groups that cultivate hatred against Christians and have targeted Christian websites and social media accounts.

Some of the cases listed above demonstrate how hate speech against Christians in the media, particularly at the local level, results in cases of threats and action.

Social media has become a platform for targeting, polarization, and every form of discrimination and is now the chief source of misinformation. Hate speech easily spreads via this media.

These types of activities directed at all Christian denominations and other minority groups creates concern in the Protestant community.

Dialogue

In 2024, the Protestant community representatives were not invited to participate in meetings of religious groups organized by the Government or by official organizations. This shows that in 2024 there is still a tendency to discount or ignore the presence of the Turkish Protestant community.

During 2024 there was close communication with several municipalities and related local authority organizations. However, we desire to have a comprehensive level of communication with all public offices and institutions.

The Protestant community continues to attach great importance to the development of relationships with all public institutions, especially the Government, Parliament and municipalities.

Recommendations

- To solve problems more easily and overcome prejudice it would be helpful if the government or public institutions would enter into dialogue with our church community regarding their efforts on issues that concern the Protestant community as well as officially inviting representatives from the Protestant community to meetings. Experience in this area shows that when the channels of communication are open, many problems are quickly solved.
- Hate speech directed at Christians has seen an increase in 2024 in comparison to the previous year. Even though complaints were registered, perpetrators being released without penalty or punishment is a source of concern and distrust. An important step toward a solution for this would be updating present laws that are open to interpretation as well as legal arrangements that would include clear statements that are not open to interpretation regarding hate speech and hate crimes. Public broadcasting to raise awareness of the issue and educate the public concerning hate speech and hate crimes would create a paradigm shift in the education and cultural awareness of the public.

- The issue of establishing places of worship for the Protestant communities which do not possess historical church buildings has been a problem for years and has not been solved. This basic right of religious expression retains its relevance as a problematic issue. Immediate steps need to be taken by national and local authorities in this matter. Christians need to have the opportunity to open small places of worship (chapels) made available to them, similar to the masjid concept. Municipalities, the Ministry of Culture, the Directorate General of Foundations and other government institutions that own church buildings but use them for other purposes should at the very least allow congregations to use the buildings for Sunday and religious holiday worship services. Where issues such as providing land for building places of worship are concerned, officials should be inclined to be helpful.
- The problems faced by church associations in relation to their rights need to be solved, in particular the right to gather for religious purposes, worship and to propagate religion.
- Within the framework of human rights education, relevant public officials should be trained in freedom of religion and conscience issues
- Open channels of communication should be established, in place of attempts to hire informants.
- In the light of the risk of stigmatization and social pressure faced by Christian families and students, the Ministry of Education is expected to proactively inform schools regarding non-Muslims' rights in schools and classrooms, in particular the right of exemption from religion classes, without waiting for families to complain. Steps beyond wishful thinking should be taken for the development of a culture based on coexistence and respect for beliefs, and its implementation should be monitored.
- The requirement of the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge class should be repealed; people should be free from the requirement to declare their faith.
- National and district government officials need to actively place on the public agenda and encourage the idea of a shared culture where understanding is shown to people of other religions and where all people are recognized as citizens of the Republic of Turkey with equal rights. A key role falls to the Ministry of Education here.
- Within the framework of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, there needs to be an effective and rapid mechanism established for oversight regarding intolerance in the media, which can deal with visual and written publications using hate speech, inciteful rhetoric and prejudice. Judicial authorities need to instigate official actions against hate crimes and speech without needing an official complaint to be filed. This is not just a vital need for Protestant Christians, but for any disadvantaged group.
- There is a need for more action to be taken by journalistic bodies and other civil society organizations to raise awareness among members of the local media (journalists, columnists) of the problem of hate speech and to require formal education to create a sensitivity towards this issue

- The policy of shock tactics applied to foreign members of the Protestant community, suddenly prohibiting their entry to the country must be changed. This situation must come to an end. These people have not been charged with any crime and are suffering purely because of their religious faith. People who are deemed undesirable to remain in our country must be interacted with in an objective, lawful and equitably applied manner.

Respectfully submitted,
Association of Protestant Churches