

# HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF OR NON-BELIEF IN TURKEY 2021

REPORT SUMMARY FINDINGS



# Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief or Non-Belief in Turkey 2021 Report – Summary Findings

*Norwegian Helsinki Committee Freedom of Belief Initiative*

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**Freedom of Belief Initiative** has continued to promote freedom of thought, religion, or belief as a human right as outlined by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee since 2011. It has done so with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2013. The Initiative's activities, which are carried out to effectively protect the right of freedom of religion or belief for everyone in Turkey, include monitoring, documentation, reporting, solution development, proposals and advocacy.

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## 1. Introduction

### *As the Freedom of Belief Initiative, what have we done about hate crimes so far?*



To increase the visibility of hate crimes, in October 2019 we worked with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) to organise a hate crime and civil society cooperation training opportunity. In 2021, we held two meetings with participants from religious or belief communities focused on improving cooperation in monitoring and reporting in order to increase the visibility of hate crimes.



We have submitted data to the OSCE regarding hate crimes motivated by bias against religion or belief in Turkey every year since 2019. This data has been used in the [OSCE's Hate Crime Reports](#).<sup>1</sup>



We have aimed to contribute to the prevention of hate crimes by increasing their visibility. We have done this by continuing to monitor hate crimes motivated by religious or belief-based bias in 2020, 2021, and 2022 in cooperation with participants from belief communities.<sup>2</sup>



In September 2021, we published [Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias Based on Religion and Belief in Turkey 2020 Report](#).

This most recent summary report of “Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief or Non-Belief in Turkey 2021” aims to contribute to the prevention of hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief and to the prevention of impunity for perpetrators of hate crimes. This monitoring activity covers the year 2021. The report and its Turkish and English summaries are based on submissions from a wide range of belief communities, the compilation of data obtained from media monitoring and subsequent further research and verification of the collected data.

While this report was being prepared, there were a series of incidents in July 2022 that could potentially be deemed hate crimes motivated by religious or belief-based bias. The first of these events was the destruction of 81 tombstones in the Hasköy Jewish Cemetery, Istanbul, on 15 July.<sup>3</sup> The other incident was consecutive attacks on two *cemevis* and an Alevi

<sup>1</sup> For the OSCE/ODIHR Hate Crimes Report: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/turkey>

<sup>2</sup> If you would like to contribute to our work on monitoring hate crimes motivated by religious or belief-based bias, you can contact us at [inancozgurlugu.info@gmail.com](mailto:inancozgurlugu.info@gmail.com) or report a hate crime at [bit.ly/nefret-sucu-bildirim](https://bit.ly/nefret-sucu-bildirim).

<sup>3</sup> Bianet, *Yahudi Mezarlığına saldırdıkları iddia edilen 5 çocuk serbest*, 16 July 2022.

foundation in Ankara on 30 July.<sup>4</sup> These events demonstrate, once again, that hate crimes motivated by bias against religion and belief can occur at any time in Turkey and reiterate the importance of taking multidimensional measures.

With the above-mentioned, and similar events, it should be kept in mind that hate crimes can have more serious effects – when compared to crimes that do not have a biased motive – on victims, people directly or indirectly connected with victims and society in general. Hate crimes, in which victims are targeted because of their identities, should be handled differently from other types of crimes. Deep collective memory and the long-term effects of trauma should also be taken into consideration.

These recent events, in particular, remind us again that the fight against hate crime in Turkey needs to be developed in an integrated manner. In order to combat hate crimes, a holistic approach is needed. The building blocks of this approach must include the monitoring and reporting of hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief or non-belief, the effective investigation of these crimes, compensation for harm, support for victims and multi-stakeholder activities.

### *Methodology*

This summary, translated from a Turkish summary of the September 2021 monitoring report, aims to fill an important gap as a holistic monitoring activity on hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief or non-belief in Turkey.

The first step was that of reviewing legislation and relevant judicial decisions regarding hate crimes in Turkey. Following this, media monitoring was conducted from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021 in order to identify incidents. In addition, we forwarded a form to religious or belief communities, and relevant non-governmental organisations, in March 2022 so they could report hate crimes committed with the motive of religious or belief-based bias. The [same form](#) was also disseminated via the [Freedom of Belief Initiative](#) website and [Twitter account](#). Data regarding all these events, both that reported and that accessed as a result of media monitoring, was analysed on the basis of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) [definition of hate crime](#) and was evaluated for inclusion in the report. Finally, we contacted the relevant people to verify and ascertain up-to-date information regarding the reported incidents.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) uses the following definition for hate crime:

**“Any criminal offence, including offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises, or target of the offence are selected because of their real or perceived connection, attachment, affiliation, support, or membership of a group. A group may be based upon a characteristic common to its members, such as real or perceived race,**

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<sup>4</sup> Agos, *Ankara'da Alevi kurumlarına ve cemevlerine peşpeşe saldırı*, Ankara, 31 July 2022.

**national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or other similar factor.”<sup>5</sup>**

OSCE participating states recognize a number of bias motives that underlie hate crimes. These categories include: racism and xenophobia, anti-Semitism, bias against Sinti and Roma people, bias against Muslims, and bias against Christians and members of other religions. The monitoring study at hand uses the categories of anti-Semitism, as well as bias against Christians, Muslims, Alevis, people who wear headscarves, atheists, and Jehovah's Witnesses or similar characteristics. The purpose of this categorization is to make the bias motive and crimes more visible. For example, insults or attacks against ‘women who wear headscarves’ can be linked to a prejudice against this specific symbol. When such crimes are lumped into the category of bias against Muslims, both the gender and symbolic dimensions of the crime are likely to be overlooked. Another example, when hate crimes motivated by bias against Alevis are categorised specifically as we have done, visibility of such hate crimes increases.

Throughout this study, we encountered limits to accessing hate crimes motivated by religious or belief-based bias, statistics, and judicial decisions. There are many reasons hate crimes are often under-reported. These include a lack of sufficient information regarding the definition and scope of a hate crime, legal regulations and remedies, or the refusal to use necessary methods for different reasons. Therefore, we believe that this report is not a complete depiction of the situation in Turkey, as we have yet to expand our monitoring work to all relevant religious and belief communities present within the country.

The fact that the statistical data from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior is neither fully accessible nor detailed – there is a notable lack of detail in reports submitted to the OSCE – remains a significant obstacle to the monitoring of, visibility of and fight against hate crimes. As such, although we aimed to conduct a more comprehensive monitoring study including the handling of hate crimes in judicial decisions, our access to these decisions was limited.

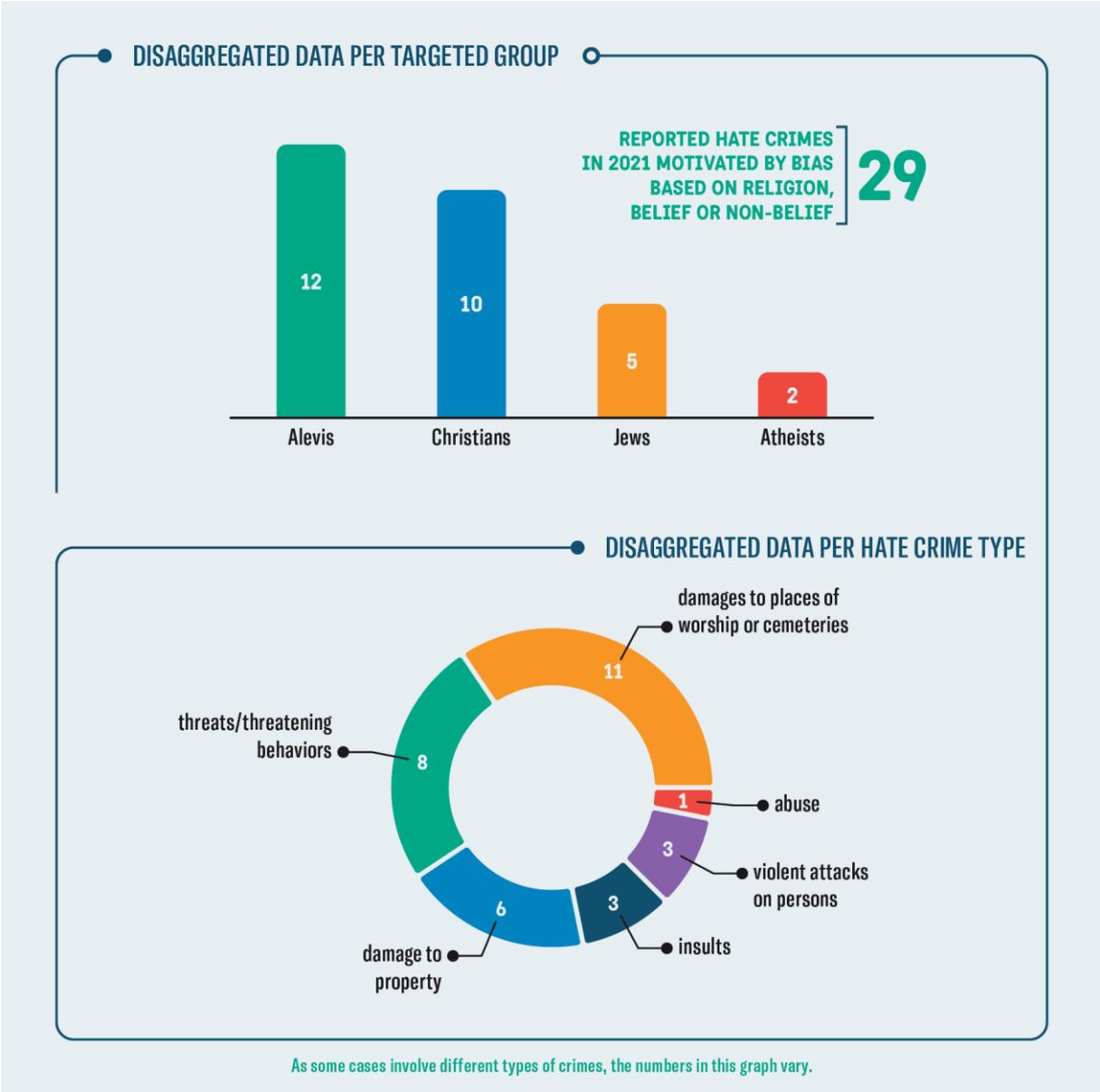
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<sup>5</sup> OSCE/ODIHR (2005), *Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region*, Warsaw, p. 12.

## 2. Reported Hate Crimes/Incidents of 2021

**29 hate crimes or incidents motivated by bias against religion, belief or non-belief were documented** for 2021. Considering that hate crimes are generally under-reported, it is likely that these numbers only present a general picture and in no way reflect the true extent of hate crime in Turkey. The main barriers to the reporting of hate crimes/incidents are as follows:

- victims are so accustomed to hate incidents that they have a high threshold for reporting such acts;
- individuals prefer not to report due to fear of exclusion or ostracization;
- victims have concerns that their allegations will not be taken seriously or will lead to greater victimisation, including that of local police officers.



**In 2021**, the Protestant community in Arhavi, Artvin was, to begin with, targeted in both print and digital media for its "missionary work" in the local press. Following this, the landlord of the Protestant community leader was pressured to evict the leader. The district head of a political party made provocative posts on social media. Although this stopped after the community leader met the district head, threats continued on the street and on social media. Walking down the street, the community leader was threatened with expressions such as "dead priest walking".<sup>6</sup>

**On 21 January 2021**, it was revealed that Alevi villages in Tokat were marked in red with the word 'Alevi' on a map with the Ministry of Health logo. The Provincial Health Directorate made a statement saying that the Ministry did not have such a map and opened an investigation against the doctor who had altered the map.<sup>7</sup>

**On 25 January 2021**, "X" marks were drawn on 5 Alevi homes in Yalova and "Alevi" was written on the walls. An investigation was launched after the incident.<sup>8</sup> However, Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation, who brought the matter to the prosecutor's office, stated that there was no development regarding the ongoing investigation.<sup>9</sup>

**On 31 January 2021**, "bastard Christian" was written on the door of the Surp Garabet Armenian Church in Üsküdar, Istanbul.<sup>10</sup>

**In February 2021**, the sign of the Jewish cemetery in Akhisar, Manisa was destroyed for the second time in two years. The first person who saw the destruction stated that the letters of the sign had been removed and it had been scratched. The sign has been restored by the same person who restored it the first time.<sup>11</sup>

**On 2 March 2021**, a person living in Amasya filed a complaint with the police stating that he was insulted by an imam on the grounds that he was an Alevi. The imam allegedly said, "You Alevis present your spouse to the *dede* (a socio-religious leader in the Alevi community) before you get married. Then you consummate the marriage yourself and accept them as a wife." Amasya's Governor's Office announced that an administrative investigation has been launched on the issue. The governor's office also stated in the press release, "The complainant stated that the incident occurred 1-1.5 years ago, and the religious officer who was heard as a suspect stated that the incident took place 4-5 years ago in a different nature than the statements of the claimant."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Association of Protestant Churches [Protestan Kiliseler Derneği], *2021 Hak İhlalleri İzleme Raporu*, 18 March 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Independent Türkçe, *Alevi köylerinin işaretlendiği haritayı paylaşan doktora soruşturma*, 21 January 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Independent Türkçe, *Yalova'da Alevilere ait 5 evin işaretlenmesinin üzerinden iki ay geçti... 10 yılda meydana gelen 37 benzer olayın soruşturmasında bir gelişme yaşanmadı*, 25 March 2021.

<sup>9</sup> E-mail correspondence with Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation dated 21 July 2021.

<sup>10</sup> E-mail correspondence with Çağrı Koşak dated 27 July 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Şalom, *Akhisar Musevi Mezarlığının tabelası tekrar yenilendi*, 24 February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Cumhuriyet, *Amasya'da Alevilere hakaret eden imama Valilik'ten soruşturma*, 4 March 2021.

**On 11 March 2021**, it was announced that the Diyarbakır Bar Association Environmental and Urban Law Commission filed a criminal complaint with the Çermik Chief Public Prosecutor's Office regarding damage to a synagogue in the Çermik district.<sup>13</sup> In the criminal complaint filed under the provisions, "Destroying Cultural and Natural Property" (Law No. 2863) and, "Damaging Places of Worship and Cemeteries" (Article 153) of the Turkish Criminal Code, the authorities were asked to determine the current damage of the historical building in question. The commission also made an administrative application to the Diyarbakır Cultural Heritage Preservation Regional Board for the protection and restoration of the mentioned cultural properties. In its statement, the Commission emphasised that the process would be monitored. The Diyarbakır Bar Association's Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Commission reported that the prosecutor's office and the Regional Directorate of Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation provided information showing that the places in question are Group 1 cultural properties necessitating protection. The commission also stated that the destruction lacked a bias motive, and was actually done in search of treasure, thus a bias motive was not included in the criminal complaint.<sup>14</sup>

**On 11 March 2021**, it was announced that the Diyarbakır Bar Association Environment and Urban Law Commission filed a criminal complaint regarding damage to the Surp Garabed Armenian Catholic Church in the Cüngüş district.<sup>15</sup> In the criminal complaint, filed under provisions on Destroying Cultural and Natural Property (Law No. 2863) and Damaging Places of Worship and Cemeteries (Law No 5237 Art. 153), it was requested that authorities determine the current extent of damage to the historical building in question. The commission also made an administrative application to the Diyarbakır Cultural Heritage Preservation Regional Board for the protection and restoration of the mentioned cultural properties. In its statement, the Commission emphasised that the process would be monitored. Diyarbakır Bar Association's Cultural and Natural Assets Protection Commission reported that the prosecutor's office and the Regional Directorate of Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation gave information showing that the places in question are Group 1 cultural properties in terms of protection. The commission also stated that, as above, the damage was done in search of treasure. Bias motive was not included in the criminal complaint.<sup>16</sup>

**On 18 March 2021**, *Takvim* newspaper targeted *Şalom* newspaper columnist Karel Valansi in an article and on social media due to her Jewish identity. In the tweet the newspaper stated, "It is worthy of attention that Ekrem Imamoglu, the one who threatens the relatives of a veteran, has such extreme respect for Karel Valansi, a journalist working in Turkey." The newspaper, both in its news and in its social media posts, targeted Valansi based on her identity by establishing Turkish-Jewish opposition and began the circulation of a dangerous

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<sup>13</sup> Mezopotamya Ajansı, *Sinagog ve kilisenin tahrip edilmesine ilişkin suç duyurusu*, 11 March 2021.

<sup>14</sup> E-mail correspondence with Hebun Baygin from Diyarbakır Bar Association Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Commission on 22 July 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Mezopotamya Ajansı, *Sinagog ve kilisenin tahrip edilmesine ilişkin suç duyurusu*, 11 March 2021.

<sup>16</sup> E-mail correspondence with Hebun Baygin from Diyarbakır Bar Association Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Commission on 22 July 2022.

discourse that, in general, would cause her Jewish identity to be perceived as a threat.<sup>17</sup> No investigation or litigation process regarding the incident occurred.

**On 20 March 2021**, the gate and some ruins of the historical Kasturya Synagogue in Fatih, Istanbul, were set on fire by unidentified people. The news stated that an investigation into the incident had been opened. An eyewitness said, "While I was crossing the road, I saw smoke coming out of the door of the Kasturya Synagogue. I took the fire extinguisher from my car and made the first response. Then I told the firefighters. They put out the fire. But the door of the synagogue was damaged."<sup>18</sup> There has been no investigation or litigation process regarding the incident.

**On 27 April 2021**, Independent Member of Parliament Ümit Özdağ threatened Garo Paylan, a Member of Parliament from the Peoples' Democratic Party, on the basis of his Armenian identity. Özdağ used the words, "You too will experience Talat Pasha when the time comes, and you must." Paylan, in a Twitter post, said, "106 years later, we are walking on streets named Talat Pasha, the architect of the Genocide. We teach our children in schools named after Talat Pasha. [Imagine] If, in Germany today, there were streets named after Hitler, if children were educated in schools named after Hitler, we are living in a Turkey that would be like this kind of a Germany." Afterwards, Özdağ quoted Paylan's post and tweeted, "Nasty provocative man. If you are not very happy about this, go to hell. Talat Pasha did not drive out patriotic Armenians, but back-stabbers like you. When the time comes, you will, and must, experience Talat Pasha."<sup>19</sup>

**On 28 April 2021**, three crescents and an "X" mark were drawn on the door of an Alevi person in Elaziğ. The word "die" was written as well. An investigation has been initiated on the matter. The victim stated that he had received threatening and insulting messages before the incident and applied to the police regarding these messages.<sup>20</sup>

**On 11 May 2021**, Marta Shimoni Church in Şırnak's Beytüşşebap district was attacked. Church statues were found toppled to the ground and rosaries had been tossed outside. In addition, ritualistic fabrics, used for praying for the healing of the sick, were thrown from a hillside and the church's cross was found in a nearby field. An application was made to the police and the prosecutor's office regarding the issue.<sup>21</sup> On 12 May 2022, a permanent search warrant was issued for the perpetrators.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Avlaremoz, *Takvim Karel Valansi'yi Hedef Gösterdi*, 18 March 2021.

<sup>18</sup> T24, *Kasturya Sinagogu'nun kapısı ateşe verildi*, 22 March 2021; Evrensel, *İstanbul'da bulunan Kasturya Sinagogu'nun kapısını ateşe verdiler*, 21 March 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Cumhuriyet, *Ümit Özdağ'dan Garo Paylan'a tehdit: Sen de zamanı gelince bir Talat Paşa deneyimi yaşayacaksın*, 27 April 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Pirha, *Alevi genci önce tehdit ettiler sonra da evine üç hilal çizip 'ölün' yazdılar*, 28 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Bianet, *Şırnak'ta kiliseye saldırı*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Beytüşşebap Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, Investigation No 2021/167, 15 May 2022.

**On 13 May 2021**, the website of the Jewish community's newspaper *Şalom* was hacked in an anti-Semitic attack. The attack, carried out by a group that defines itself as the, "İBDA-Cyber Front", contained a poem by Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, stating, "A missile next to sling stones, the difference between us and other realms!" The hack also contained the statement, "Our actions will continue until Palestine is free and independent!" The newspaper management filed a criminal complaint regarding the attack.<sup>23</sup>

**On 2 June 2021**, an Alevi family living in Avcılar, Istanbul stated that they were beaten by their neighbours and subjected to hate speech and insults such as, "Godless, bookless, Red-heads" and, "May Allah burn those who are disturbed by the sound of the adhan." It was reported that the victims filed a criminal complaint.<sup>24</sup>

**From June-July 2021**, the Aydın Kurtuluş Church pastor and church community were threatened with multiple Facebook posts. Residents of Aydın also participated in these posts, and church officials filed a criminal complaint with the police, citing threats to kill and behead Christians. One person was detained in connection with the incident and was later released. The Association of Protestant Churches stated in its [2021 Rights Violations Monitoring Report](#) that the competent authorities had not informed them about the state of the criminal complaint.<sup>25</sup> At the time of the writing of this report, the litigation process regarding the incident was still ongoing.<sup>26</sup>

**In July 2021**, a person applied to the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office alleging that he was threatened and followed home on the grounds that he was an atheist.<sup>27</sup> The prosecution decided that there was no need to prosecute the death threats. The victim's appeal on 17 November 2021 was rejected.<sup>28</sup>

**On 11 July 2021**, three people danced on the wall of the Surp Takavor Armenian Church in Kadıköy, Istanbul. A lawsuit was filed against the people in question on the grounds of 'insulting the religious values adopted by a section of the public'. The court gave a verdict of acquittal in 2022, stating that the defendants had no criminal intent.<sup>29</sup>

**On 15 July 2021**, the words, "Alevi, get lost Kurd", were written on the wall of a house in Esenyurt, Istanbul. It was stated that the victim, who went to the police to file a criminal complaint, was threatened with criminal charges under Article 216 on "provoking the public

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<sup>23</sup> Agos, *Şalom gazetesinin internet sitesi hacklendi*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>24</sup> sendika.org, *Avcılar'da Alevi aileye taşlı saldırı: "Allahsızlar, kitapsızlar, Kızılbaşlar*, 3 June 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Association of Protestant Churches, *2021 Hak İhlalleri İzleme Raporu*, 18 March 2022.

<sup>26</sup> E-mail correspondence with İhsan Özbek, dated 12 August 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Complainant statement no. 2021/1554 from İluh Şehit Özkan Kocaer Police Station Headquarters, sent by the Atheism Association.

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence with Onur Romano from the Atheism Association on 11 August 2021. Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, 2021/40405 CBS Investigation File, 17 November 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Gazete Duvar, *Kadıköy'de kilise kapısı üstünde dans edenler beraat etti*, 6 March 2022.

to hatred, hostility or degrading"<sup>30</sup> because the victim had shared the incident on social media.<sup>31</sup>

**On 5 August 2021**, it was reported that an Alevi family living in Izmir was subjected to consecutive insults, intense verbal abuse, and threats from their neighbours for two years on the grounds that they were Alevis and Kurds. The family stated that the person living in the apartment above them pounded the floor with heavy objects at regular intervals for two years, rang their doorbell in the middle of the night and ran away, and damaged their belongings. The family, who stated that they were exposed to such insults as, "Get out of here dirty Alevis, I'll kick you out of here" and, "I bet they don't even have a TR ID number", brought the matter to court.<sup>32</sup>

**On 14 August 2021**, the back window of Ali Baba Sultan Cemevi in Pendik, Istanbul was broken into at midnight. The Istanbul Governor's Office announced that 2 suspects related to the incident were caught and the investigation is continuing.<sup>33</sup>

**On 24 August 2021**, it was reported in the press that the Armenian cemetery in Tuşba, Van, was destroyed by construction equipment. Soil was poured over the removed tombstones and many bones of the deceased were exposed. Peoples' Democratic Party Van Deputy Murat Sarısaç raised the issue by submitting a parliamentary question.

**On 25 August 2021**, "Kızılbaş" was spray painted with an X sign on the walls of Alevi houses in Seyhan, Adana. The Peoples' Democratic Party and the Republican People's Party (CHP) deputies brought the matter to the Parliament's agenda and submitted parliamentary questions demanding an answer by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu.<sup>34</sup> "What actions were taken after the attack in Adana?", asked CHP Deputy Burhanettin Bulut. In the Ministry of Interior's response, dated 15 March 2022, the following statements were included: "The sanctions to be applied within the scope of the crime of 'hate and discrimination' are regulated in the relevant articles of the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237, and investigations regarding the events that occurred have been carried out in accordance with the instructions of the judicial authorities."<sup>35</sup>

**On 20 September 2021**, it was reported that a Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge teacher at a secondary school in Mamak, Ankara insulted Alevis during the lesson. The teacher allegedly said, "Those who are Alevis should raise their hands." It has been reported that he

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<sup>30</sup> Each paragraph of this provision regulates a separate crime: provoking/inciting hatred or hostility between groups of the population (Art. 216(1)); public degrading of a section of the population (Art. 216(2)) and public degrading of religious values of a section of the population (Art. 216(3)).

<sup>31</sup> Gazete Duvar, *HDP'li Sezer Öztürk'ün evine çarpmı işareti ve ırkçı yazılama*, 15 July 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Pirha, *İzmir'de Alevi aileye yönelik nefret söylemi: Buradan çıkıp gidin pis Aleviler!*, 5 August 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Agos, *Pendik'te cemevine saldırı: 2 gözaltı*, 14 August 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Bianet, *Adana'da Alevi ailelerin evleri işaretlendi*, 26 August 2021.

<sup>35</sup> For documents related to the parliamentary question dated 31 August 2021 with the main number 7/49952 addressed to the Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu:

[https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/yazili\\_sozlu\\_soru\\_sd.onerge\\_bilgileri?kanunlar\\_sira\\_no=299415](https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/yazili_sozlu_soru_sd.onerge_bilgileri?kanunlar_sira_no=299415)

used the phrases, "Why don't Alevi perform ablution and pray?", "Why is fasting not observed?" and "We do not love Hazrat Ali. Hazrat Ali cursed the wife of our Prophet." After the incident, while parents were meeting with the teacher, the teacher pointed to one parent's Zulfiqar necklace and said, "I don't need to ask anyway. It's clear who is who. I can tell from the necklace." While Peoples' Democratic Party Deputy Zeynel Özen was giving a parliamentary question on the subject, the Ankara Governor's Office launched an investigation, and it was announced that the teacher was later dismissed.<sup>36</sup>

**On 11 October 2021**, "Satan" was written on the wall of the Surp Garabet Armenian Church in Üsküdar, Istanbul.<sup>37</sup>

**On 16 October 2021**, a teacher working in a secondary school in Altınözü, Hatay was attacked by a friend of the school principal. It was stated that the teacher had been subjected to systematic pressure, harassment, and coercion by the principal for three years. It was reported that the suspect, who was stated to have attacked the teacher with an iron chair, had previously come to the teacher's house and said, "I don't want him since he is an Alevi."<sup>38</sup>

**On 27 October 2021**, the air conditioner discharge pipe of a teacher's house in the Harran district of Şanlıurfa was set on fire on the grounds that his wife was an Alevi. It was stated that the teacher's house had been pelted with stones by children and he had been subjected to insults such as "drunkard, alcoholic". **On 27 November 2021**, the victim stated that a mosque and other symbols were spray painted in red on a wall of his house. The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office announced that a comprehensive judicial and administrative investigation has been initiated regarding the incident.<sup>39</sup>

**On 28 October 2021**, it was reported that a member and volunteer of the Atheism Association in Batman was beaten with a gun on the grounds that he was an atheist. In his statement, the victim stated that he had filed a complaint with the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office because he received death threats on social media in July 2021 and was followed to his home. The victim also stated that the attackers said, "The world is small, you thought we could not find you Godless" and "Godless, infidel".<sup>40</sup> The investigation process regarding the assault continues.<sup>41</sup>

**On 30 December 2021**, "Allah 1" was written with spray paint on the door of the Anatolian Protestant Church in Kadıköy, Istanbul. It was reported that the suspect was released with the order of the prosecutor's office after he gave his statement at the police station.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gazete Duvar, *Din kültürü öğretmeninden Alevi öğrencilere: Hz. Ali'yi sevmeyiz*, 24 September 2021; Cumhuriyet, *Alevilerle ilgili skandal ifadelerde bulunan öğretmen hakkında karar*, 24 September 2021.

<sup>37</sup> E-mail correspondence with Çağrı Koşak dated 27 July 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Cumhuriyet, *Alevi öğretmene sandalyeli saldırı*, 16 October 2021.

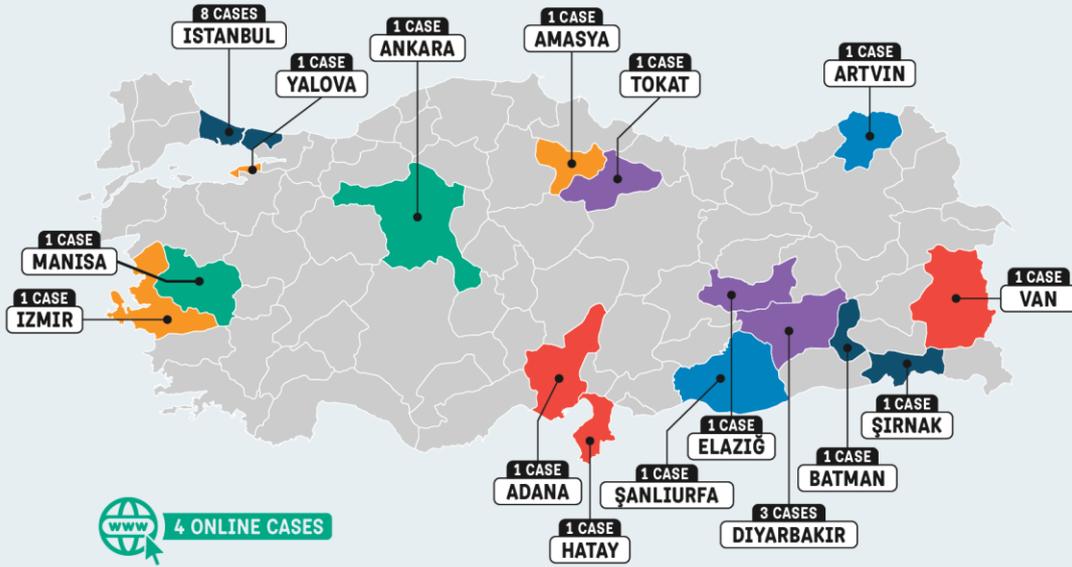
<sup>39</sup> Cumhuriyet, *Ateş yakıp duvarını işaretlediler: CHP'li yöneticinin eşine saldırı*, 28 November 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Complainant statement no. 2021/1554 from İlüh Şehit Özkan Kocaer Police Station Headquarters, sent by the Atheism Association.

<sup>41</sup> Correspondence with Onur Romano from the Atheism Association on 11 August 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Artı Gerçek, *Kadıköy'de kilise kapısına yazı yazan şüpheli serbest bırakıldı*, 1 January 2022.

## WHERE DID HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS BASED ON RELIGION, BELIEF OR NON-BELIEF OCCUR IN 2021?



ISTANBUL	Anti-Christian writing on the door of the Surp Garabet Armenian Church
ISTANBUL	Burning of door of the Kasturian Synagogue
ISTANBUL	Physical attack on Alevi
ISTANBUL	A group dancing on the walls of the Surp Takavor Church
ISTANBUL	Marking the house of Alevi
ISTANBUL	Attack on Ali Baba Cemevi
ISTANBUL	Anti-Christian writing on the Surp Garabet Church
ISTANBUL	Graffiti on Istanbul Anatolian Protestant Church
DIYARBAKIR	Damage to a synagogue
DIYARBAKIR	Damage to the Surp Garabed Armenian Church
DIYARBAKIR	Threats against and stalking of an atheist
ADANA	Marking the houses of Alevi
AMASYA	An imam insulting an Alevi
ANKARA	Alevi students insulted by a Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethics teacher
ARTVIN	Systematic threats to the Arhavi Protestant community and its leader
BATMAN	Physical attack on an atheist
ELAZIĞ	Threatening an Alevi and marking his house
HATAY	Physical attack on an Alevi teacher
IZMIR	Successive threats, harassment, and insults to an Alevi family
MANISA	Damage to a Jewish cemetery sign
ŞANLIURFA	A series of attacks on Alevi homes
ŞIRNAK	Attack on Martha Shimoni Church
TOKAT	A doctor marking Alevi villages on a map
VAN	Damage to an Armenian cemetery
YALOVA	Marking 5 Alevi houses
FACEBOOK	Threats to Aydın Kurtuluş Church pastor and community on Facebook
ŞALOM WEB	Hacking of the Şalom website with an anti-Semitic attack
TWITTER	Targeting journalist Karel Valensi by highlighting her Jewish identity
TWITTER	Targeting Garo Paylan by highlighting his Armenian identity

WHEN DID HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS BASED ON RELIGION, BELIEF OR NON-BELIEF OCCUR IN 2021?

**2021, THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

Systematic threats to Artvin Arhavi Protestant community and its leader

**JANUARY 25, 2021**

Marking 5 Alevi houses in Yalova

**FEBRUARY 2021**

Damage to a Jewish cemetery sign in Manisa

**MARCH 11, 2021\***

Damage to a synagogue in Diyarbakir (\* Reported date)

**MARCH 18, 2021**

Targeting journalist Karel Valensi by highlighting her Jewish identity

**APRIL 27, 2021**

Targeting Garo Paylan by highlighting his Armenian identity

**MAY 11, 2021**

Attack on Marta Shimoni Church in Şırnak

**JUNE-JULY 2021**

Threats to Aydın Kurtuluş Church pastor and community on Facebook

**JULY 2021**

Threats against and stalking of an atheist in Diyarbakir

**JULY 15, 2021**

Marking the house of Alevis in Istanbul

**AUGUST 14, 2021**

Attack on Ali Baba Cemevi in Istanbul

**AUGUST 25, 2021**

Marking the houses of Alevis in Adana

**OCTOBER 11, 2021**

Anti-Christian writing on Istanbul Surp Garabet Church

**OCTOBER 27, 2021\***

A series of attacks on Alevi homes in Şanlıurfa (\* Recurring case; second incident on November 27, 2021)

**DECEMBER 30, 2021**

Graffiti on Istanbul Anatolian Protestant Church

**JANUARY 21, 2021**

A doctor marking Alevi villages on a map in Tokat

**JANUARY 31, 2021**

Anti-Christian writing on the door of the Istanbul Surp Garabet Armenian Church

**MARCH 2, 2021**

An imam insulting an Alevi in Amasya

**MARCH 11, 2021\***

Damage to Diyarbakir Surp Garabet Armenian Church (\* Reported date)

**MARCH 20, 2021**

Burning the gate of Istanbul Kasturya Synagogue

**APRIL 28, 2021**

Threatening an Alevi and marking his house in Elaziğ

**MAY 13, 2021**

Hacking of the Şalom website with an anti-Semitic attack

**JUNE 2, 2021**

Physical attack on Alevis in Istanbul

**JULY 11, 2021**

A group dancing on the walls of Istanbul Kadıköy Surp Takavor Church

**AUGUST 5, 2021\***

Successive threats, harassment, and insults to an Alevi family in Izmir (\* Reported date)

**AUGUST 24, 2021**

Damage to Armenian cemetery in Van

**SEPTEMBER 20, 2021**

Alevi students insulted by a Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethics teacher in Ankara

**OCTOBER 16, 2021**

Physical attack on an Alevi teacher in Hatay

**OCTOBER 28, 2021**

Physical attack on an atheist in Batman

### 3 . Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The right to freedom of religion or belief is vital for inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies. It is one of the most important components of international human rights law. States have an obligation to ensure the equal enjoyment of this right by all and to take necessary measures to prevent hate crimes that interfere with human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief, and to investigate bias motives.

In the period of 2021, according to the available data;

- Alevi have been the target of 12 hate crimes or incidents
- Christians have been the target of 10 hate crimes or incidents
- Jews have been the target of 5 hate crimes or incidents
- Atheists have been the target of 2 hate crimes or incidents.

**According to the accessible data, none of the hate crimes that took place in 2021, all meriting special sensitivity, were subject to an effective legal process inclusive of the hate crime dimension.** The recorded hate crimes/incidents include various crimes, such as damage to property, threats, violent attacks against persons, damage to places of worship or cemeteries, harassment, and insults. In addition, hate crimes occurred in many different regions of Turkey, such as Istanbul, Batman, Aydın, and Diyarbakır. One of the surfacing trends, upon evaluating reported incidents, **is the repeated nature by which locations venues related to religious or belief communities are targeted.** For example, inscriptions were made on the wall and door of the Surp Garabet Armenian Church in Istanbul twice in 2021. It was reported that inscriptions were made on the same church in the beginning of 2022 as well. The sign of the Jewish cemetery in Akhisar, Manisa was destroyed twice in two years. Furthermore, although not included within the scope of this report, Kurdish identity was also targeted intersectionally in two hate incidents motivated by bias against Alevi.<sup>43</sup> Political party representatives or volunteers were targeted in two cases.<sup>44</sup> This situation could also be evaluated as a reflection of the political polarisation in the society. **The intersectional nature of these events generates the need for holistic and multi-stakeholder activities on hate crimes that, going even beyond bias against religion or belief, target dissimilar identities.**

While evaluating the data in this report, it should be taken into account that there are significant obstacles to reporting or declaring hate incidents, and therefore this data does not reflect the true extent of hate crimes in Turkey.

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<sup>43</sup> The events in question: Gazete Duvar, *HDP'li Sezer Öztürk'ün evine çarpı işaretleri ve ırkçı yazılama*, 15 July 2021; Pirha, *İzmir'de Alevi aileye yönelik nefret söylemi: Buradan çıkıp gidin pis Aleviler!*, 5 August 2021.

<sup>44</sup> The events in question: Pirha, *Alevi genci önce tehdit ettiler sonra da evine üç hilal çizip 'ölün' yazdılar*, 28 April 2021; Gazete Duvar, *HDP'li Sezer Öztürk'ün evine çarpı işaretleri ve ırkçı yazılama*, 15 July 2021.

As discussed in this report, the [Human Rights Action Plan dated April 2021](#) has set these targets to be achieved in one year:

- to draft a new regulation in the Turkish Penal Code regarding discrimination and hate crime (Activity 4.4.e.), and
- establishing a database on discrimination, hate crimes and misdemeanours; and ensuring the reliable collection of statistics (Activity 4.4.h.)

**However, these targets have not been met and hate crime legislation in Turkey is still far from adequate.** Therefore, authorities must act immediately to develop a comprehensive legislation and combat policies of impunity.

The registration of hate crime data disaggregated by bias motivation and ensuring public access to this data is vital. It will better guarantee the proper analysis of the current situation regarding hate crimes, the development of effective strategies for combating hate crime and the provision of necessary support to victims. Official data on hate crime in Turkey is, currently, both very limited and not disaggregated by bias motivation. The disaggregation of the data and provision of public access were not included in the Human Rights Action Plan. There is an urgent need to carry out studies aimed at improving the registration system in order to develop effective solutions.

Along with the above, an effective way to combat discrimination-based issues such as hate crimes would be to establish collaboration amongst groups with different expertise, experience, resources, and connections. In particular, the joint efforts of groups targeted by hate crimes and civil society to collaborate in combating hate crimes could act as a trigger for permanent changes.

The OSCE/ODIHR provides many tools and resources to improve hate crime monitoring and registration practices, support hate crime victims, and strengthen authorities' cooperation with civil society.<sup>45</sup>

## **Recommendations for public authorities, civil society and religious or belief communities:**

### **Public officials**

- In order to prevent and combat hate crimes including those motivated by bias against religion and belief, public officials must pursue new legislation on hate crimes, disaggregated registration of hate crimes, effective investigation and the prosecution and enforcement of appropriate sanctions:
  - Public authorities should carry out a transparent process with greater and diverse participation, including that of relevant experts, to develop an integrated strategy for combating hate crimes.

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<sup>45</sup>For the mentioned resources, see: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/guides-related-to-hate-crime>

- Hate crimes legislation and policy framework should be adopted based on international human rights standards including the key elements below:
  - hate crime should be included in the definitions section of the Turkish Penal Code;
  - comprehensive, proportionate and deterrent legislation on hate crimes, including provisions on civil, criminal and administrative law must be adopted;
  - a general aggravating circumstances provision for hate crimes should be put in place;
  - existing legislation must be effectively implemented;
  - the option of community service should be envisaged along with criminal sanctions;
  - non-governmental organisations working and advocating on the subject should have the right to file lawsuits and to be involved in legal proceedings.
  
- A new public institution should be authorised and tasked by legislation to carry out the process of monitoring hate crimes, collecting statistical data, evaluating this data and sharing it with the public in the form of regular reports.
- Since the collection of evidence of bias motivation by law enforcement officers will directly affect the subsequent criminal proceedings:
  - deficiencies in the current registration system and method and content of data collection must be identified;
  - the data collection and analysis system must ensure that data collected on hate crimes can be disaggregated by bias motive, type of crime and gender;
  - law enforcement personnel should receive regular training on hate crimes and the detection and recording of bias motivation;
  - a list of bias motivations and an appropriate database should be put in place so that law enforcement personnel can record bias motivation.
  
- **Multidimensional measures must be taken to meet the needs of the victims:**
  - the safety and security needs of individuals or communities must be met; places of worship and social spaces used for worship, regardless of their status, should be effectively protected;
  - practical assistance should be provided to victims after a hate crime has occurred;
  - short- and long-term emotional and psychological support should be provided;
  - personal information must be protected and trust should be built;
  - information and advice should be provided;

- victims who report hate crimes should be assisted in accessing the judicial system;
  - victims must be treated with respect and dignity.
- The ongoing mutual exchange of information and cooperation between law enforcement officers, civil society and religious or belief communities must be strengthened.
  - Victimisation surveys must be conducted, keeping in mind that the reporting of hate crimes by victims is, as of yet, insufficient.

#### Civil society should:

- strengthen contact and cooperation with the media in order to disseminate accurate information about hate crimes and raise awareness;
- work closely with other organisations and religious or belief groups to develop policies, advocacy strategies, and tools for change in the fight against hate crime, and to build coalitions or platforms to drive broader advocacy on the issue;
- raise public awareness and contribute to the formation of public opinion about hate crimes and their consequences for a community via a variety of activities, including campaigns, forums, conferences, workshops, and the production of visual or written material;
- plan activities involving educators as stakeholders for the prevention of and to raise awareness regarding hate crimes;
- organise activities in collaboration with religious or belief communities with the goal of strengthening communities against hate crimes;
- run programs aimed at young people as a useful strategy for the prevention of hate crime and to empower communities against hate crime;
- provide training for professionals such as police agencies, lawyers, social service providers, teachers and health care professionals;
- provide direct support to victims, including the establishment of a support and counselling centre.
- monitor and report hate crimes as well as official responses; both the authorities and the public can be mobilised as a result;
- increase impact by collaborating with academics and experts on hate crime;
- plan monitoring, reporting, advocacy and awareness-raising activities against hate speech to strengthen the fight against hate crimes.<sup>46</sup>

#### Religious or belief communities should:

- carry out awareness raising activities about hate crime within religious or belief communities;
- report hate crimes, create their own registry database and share data which may increase the visibility of hate crimes;

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<sup>46</sup> Some of these recommendations are adapted from the guide titled, “Nefret Suçlarını Önleme ve Karşılama” prepared by the OSCE/ODIHR and translated into Turkish by KAOS GL Association .

- participate in joint monitoring and reporting initiatives;
- offer practical support and share information with individuals or communities who are victims of hate crimes;
- cooperate with organisations that work on hate crimes with motives beyond those motivated by a bias against religion or belief.



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