

REPORT 2023

**HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR
NON-BELIEF IN TÜRKİYE 2022 REPORT – SUMMARY FINDINGS**



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by Bias against Religion,
Belief, or Non-Belief
in Türkiye 2022 Report

– Summary Findings



Norwegian
Helsinki Committee

Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief, or Non-Belief in Türkiye 2022 Report – Summary Findings

Norwegian Helsinki Committee's Freedom of Belief Initiative

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Publication date: August 2023

Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) is an Oslo based human rights organisation established in 1977 that works internationally to strengthen the protection of human rights in practice. To this end the NHC's activities include monitoring, reporting, human rights training, and supporting civil society and democratic structures. The NHC's work is based on the human rights instruments adopted in the context of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Freedom of Belief Initiative has promoted freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as a human right since 2011. The Initiative's activities include monitoring, documentation, reporting, making policy recommendations, and advocacy. Specifically regarding religion or belief-based hate crimes, it also conducts monitoring, reporting, capacity building, and awareness raising activities.

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Many people have contributed to this report. We would like to sincerely thank all the contributors for their valuable contribution.

This report has been produced with the support of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of EED. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this publication lies entirely with the authors.

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1. Introduction

Hate crime motivated by bias against a religion, belief, or non-belief, like all other hate crime, continues to be a critical issue in Türkiye. Hate crimes can have more serious impacts on victims, those directly or indirectly associated with victims, and society in general than crimes without a bias motive. With every hate crime, a message is sent to the victims and their associated group; that they are not entitled to equal rights as the rest of society. As such, hate crimes constitute a serious obstacle to social peace. **However, legislation and practice in Türkiye are far from adequate against these crimes.**

This summary report of “Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief, or Non-Belief in Türkiye 2022” 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 report covering the year 2022, compiles submissions from religion or belief communities, data accessed from media monitoring, and information obtained during the assessment process.

The data presented in this report remind us once again that the fight against hate crime in Türkiye needs to be developed in a holistic manner. To this end, the prominent needs are:

- Monitoring and reporting of hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief,
- the effective investigation of these crimes,
- compensation for harm
- a holistic approach to victim support,
- multistakeholder activities.

Methodology

This summary report, based on the [full Turkish version](#), aims to fill an important gap on hate crimes motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief in Türkiye. The report is based on a review of legislation that can be addressed regarding hate crimes.

To identify the incidents, media monitoring was conducted over the period of January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022. Additionally, a [form](#) was circulated for reporting hate crimes committed with the motive of religion or belief-based bias. The information obtained was analysed based on the hate crime definition of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the data was evaluated for inclusion in the report. Finally, the relevant people and institutions were contacted to verify and access up-to-date information about the detected 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, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor.”¹

This monitoring work focuses on bias motives against Jews, Christians, Muslims, Alevis, those wearing headscarves, atheists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Yazidis, and any other religion or belief.

Throughout this study, some limitations were encountered in accessing statistics and judicial decisions on hate crimes motivated by bias based on religion. Moreover, hate crimes are often under-reported and not always covered in the media. As such, the information in the report does not reflect the whole picture, as our work could not be sufficiently disseminated among the relevant religious or belief communities and non-believers.

The fact that the statistical information from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior is neither fully accessible nor detailed, remains a significant obstacle to activities on hate crimes. Finally, although it was the goal to conduct a more comprehensive monitoring study by including the handling of hate crimes in judicial decisions, access to these decisions has been limited.

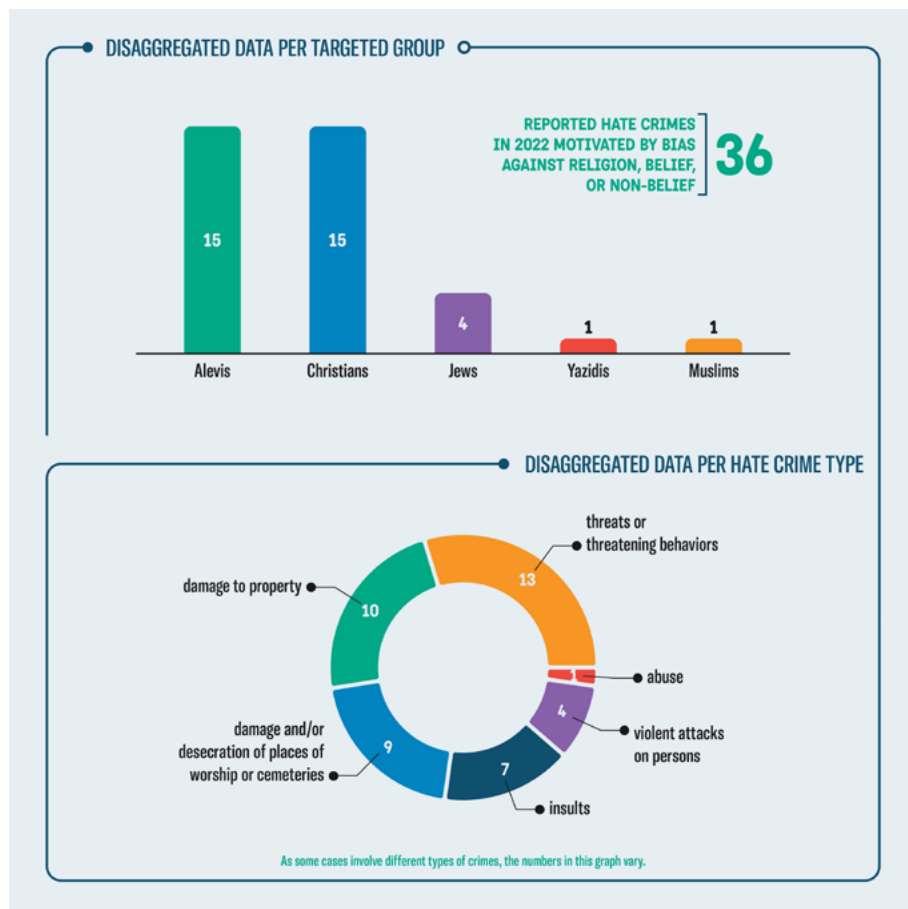
1 OSCE/ODIHR (2005), *Combating Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region*, Warsaw, p. 12.

2. Hate crimes or incidents data for 2022

Within the calendar year of 2022, information on 36 hate crimes or incidents related to religion, belief or non-belief have been documented.²

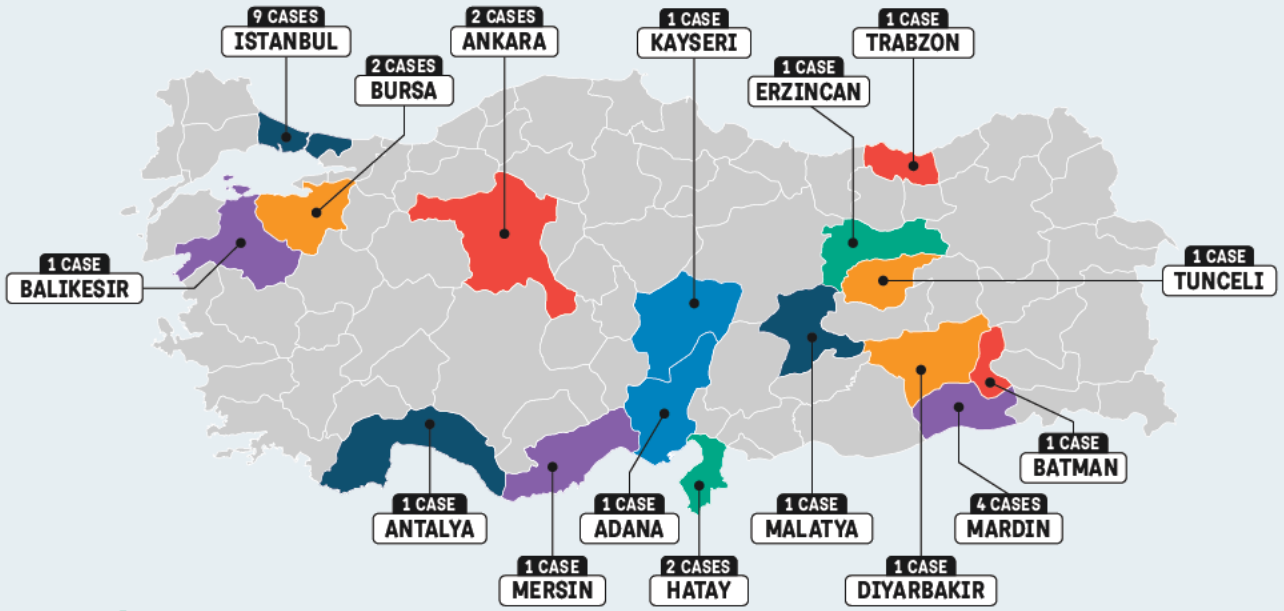
Considering that hate crimes are generally under-reported, it is likely that these numbers only present a general picture and in no way reflect the true extent of hate crime in Türkiye. The main barriers to the reporting of hate crimes/incidents are as follows:

- 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 from local police officers.



² At this point, it should be noted that incidents may not amount to crime in national legislation.

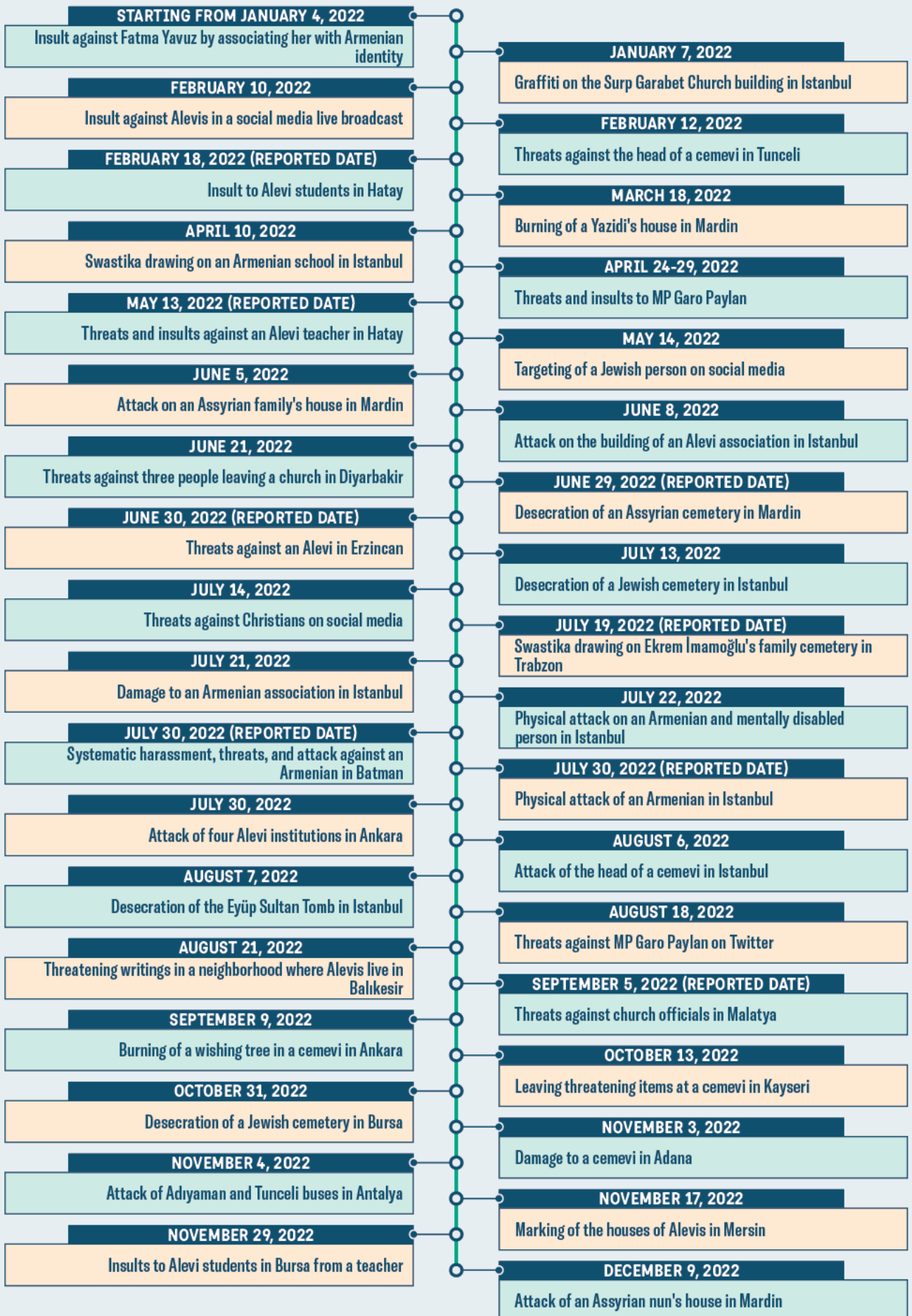
LOCATIONS OF HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR NON-BELIEF IN 2022



6 ONLINE CASES (OR POLITICIAN STATEMENTS)

ISTANBUL	Graffiti on the Surp Garabet Church building
ISTANBUL	Swastika drawing on an Armenian school
ISTANBUL	Attack on the building of an Alevi association
ISTANBUL	Desecration of a Jewish cemetery
ISTANBUL	Damage to an Armenian association
ISTANBUL	Physical attack on an Armenian and mentally disabled person
ISTANBUL	Physical attack of an Armenian
ISTANBUL	Attack of the head of a cemevi
ISTANBUL	Desecration of the Eyüp Sultan Tomb
MARDIN	Burning of a Yazidi's house
MARDIN	Attack on an Assyrian family's house
MARDIN	Desecration of an Assyrian cemetery
MARDIN	Attack of an Assyrian nun's house
ANKARA	Attack of four Alevi institutions
ANKARA	Burning of a wishing tree in a cemevi
BURSA	Desecration of a Jewish cemetery
BURSA	Insults to Alevi students from a teacher
HATAY	Insult to Alevi students
HATAY	Threats and insults against an Alevi teacher
ADANA	Damage of a cemevi
ANTALYA	Attack of Adiyaman and Tunceli buses
BALIKESIR	Threatening writings in an Alevi neighborhood
BATMAN	Systematic harassment, threats, and attack against an Armenian
DIYARBAKIR	Threats against three people leaving a church
ERZINCAN	Threats against an Alevi
KAYSERI	Leaving threatening items at a cemevi
MALATYA	Threats against church officials
MERSIN	Marking of the houses of Alevis
TRABZON	Swastika drawing on Ekrem İmamoğlu's family cemetery
TUNCELI	Threats against the head of a cemevi
ONLINE MEDIA	Insult against Fatma Yavuz by associating her with Armenian identity
SOCIAL MEDIA	Insult against Alevis in live broadcast
SOCIAL MEDIA	Threats and insults to MP Garo Paylan
SOCIAL MEDIA	Targeting of a Jewish person
SOCIAL MEDIA	Threats against Christians
SOCIAL MEDIA	Threats against MP Garo Paylan on Twitter

TIMELINE OF HATE CRIMES MOTIVATED BY BIAS AGAINST RELIGION, BELIEF, OR NON-BELIEF IN 2022



3. Concluding remarks and recommendations

The hate crime/incident data obtained for 2022 contained the following targeted groups and numbers of incidences:

- Alevis 15
- Christians 15
- Jews 4
- Yazidis 1
- Muslims 1

At this point, it should be noted that in some of the hate crimes that Christians have been subjected to, ethnic identities, such as Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek are also targeted. Especially in the context of Türkiye, it is not easy to distinguish between ethnic and religious identities due to their intersection. Therefore, these events were categorized as bias against Christians within the framework of methodological limits in the report. **The frequency of these intersectional events demonstrates the need for comprehensive studies on these crimes.**

The protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief is vital for inclusive and democratic societies and 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.

However, **according to the available data, most of the hate crimes that took place in 2022, all meriting special scrutiny, were not subjected to an effective legal process inclusive of the probing the hate crime dimension.** As a result, steps have not been taken to combat impunity. These incidents, which took place in many parts of Türkiye, include, respectively, threats or threatening behaviors, damage to property, damage and/or desecration of places of worship or cemeteries, insults, violent attacks on persons, and abuse.

When evaluated together with the monitoring data of previous years, **attacks against places related to religious or belief communities such as cemeteries, places of worship, houses or schools are among the most common events.** The marking of places and structures associated with Alevis and Alevism has for a long time been one of the most commonly observed incidents. Like other hate crimes, preventive and deterrent measures need to be taken against these markings, which have been frequently experienced in the past and have turned into incidents involving physical violence against individuals.

Upon evaluating reported incidents, it became clear that places and structures related to religious or belief communities are in fact repeatedly targeted. For instance, two inscriptions were made on the wall and door of the Surp Garabet Armenian Church in Istanbul in 2021, and it was reported that the same church was vandalized again in the beginning of 2022. As well, reportedly that the Hacibektaş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation Ceyhan Branch Cemevi, which was damaged in 2022, had been subjected to

similar attacks before. Similarly, a detailed analysis of the events shows that some people have been subjected to systematic threat or pressure. The continuity of the events reveals that there is no effective practice against these crimes.

Since there are significant obstacles to reporting hate crimes, it should be noted that the data in this report do not reflect the true extent of these crimes.

The Ministry of Justice' 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 Criminal 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 Türkiye is still far from adequate. Therefore, the authorities must act immediately to develop comprehensive legislation and combat impunity. To effectively tackle hate crimes, comprehensive registration of hate crimes data, disaggregated by bias motivation, and ensuring public access to this data is vital. Currently however, official data on hate crime in Türkiye is both very limited and not disaggregated by bias motivation. Proper analysis of the immensity of the problem and its solutions is only possible with detailed data. Since official data is not sufficient, it is vital for civil society to systematically monitor and report.

Along with the above, an effective way to combat prejudice and discrimination-based issues such as hate crimes would be to build collaboration amongst groups with different expertise, experience, resources, and connections. The systematic information obtained from our monitoring work and other studies on the subject shows us that hate crimes do not target a single group. As such, **there is a need for multi-stakeholder activities on hate crimes.** 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

→ In order to prevent and combat hate crimes, including those motivated by bias against religion, belief, or non-belief public officials must adopt new legislation, ensure the disaggregated registration of hate crimes, conduct effective investigations and prosecution, and enforce appropriate sanctions:

- ↳ Public authorities must carry out a transparent reform process with greater and more diverse participation, including that of relevant experts, to develop an integrated strategy for combating hate crimes.
- ↳ Hate crime legislation and policy framework must be adopted based on international human rights standards including the following key elements:
 - hate crime must be included in the definitions section of the Turkish Criminal Code;
 - comprehensive, proportionate, and deterrent legislation on hate crime, including provisions on civil, criminal, and administrative law must be adopted;
 - a general aggravating circumstances provision for hate crime must 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES [CONTINUE]

- ↳ A new public institution should be authorised and tasked by legislation to carry out the process of monitoring hate crimes, the collection and evaluation of statistical data, and its sharing 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 recording 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;

Victims must be provided with;

 - ↳ practical assistance;
 - ↳ short- and long-term emotional and psychological support;
 - ↳ information and advice;
 - ↳ treatment with respect and dignity;
 - ↳ protection of personal information and trust;
 - ↳ assistance (for those who report hate crimes) in accessing the judicial system.
- **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, yet, insufficient.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- **strengthen contact and cooperation with the media 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 expand 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;**
- **organise activities in collaboration with religious or belief communities with the goal of strengthening communities against hate crime;**
- **run programs aimed at the youth as a useful strategy for the prevention of hate crime and to empower communities against hate crime;**
- **provide training for professionals such as law enforcement agencies, lawyers, social service providers, teachers, and health care professionals;**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY [CONTINUE]

- provide direct support to victims, including the establishment of support and counselling centres.
- monitor and report hate crimes as well as official responses; both the authorities and the public can be mobilised as a result;
- increase their 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.³

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF COMMUNITIES

- carry out awareness raising activities about hate crime within religious or belief communities;
- report hate crime, create their own registry database, and share data which may increase the visibility of hate crimes;
- participate in joint monitoring and reporting initiatives;
- offer practical support and share information with victims;
- cooperate with organisations that work on hate crimes with motives beyond those motivated by a bias against religion or belief.

³ 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.

#SayNoToHateCrime

*We know that hate crime can be prevented,
take action against hate crime and
stand up for equality!*



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